

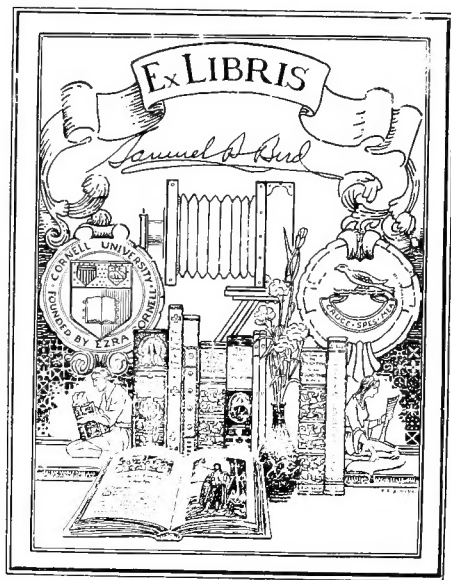
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THE SECRET MEMOIRS
OF
THE DUC DE ROQUELAURE

*This Edition is strictly limited to 1000 numbered Copies,
500 of which are for America.*

No. 32.

THE SECRET MEMOIRS OF THE
DUC DE ROQUELAURE WRITTEN
BY HIMSELF NOW FOR THE FIRST
TIME COMPLETELY TRANSLATED
INTO ENGLISH IN FOUR VOLUMES
VOLUME ONE

1617-83

PRIVATELY PRINTED

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE Duc de Roquelaure was born in 1617, during the regency of Marie de Medici. While a courtier, he saw the rise and death of the great Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, the tragedy of Cinq-Mars and De Thou, and the greater portion of the reign of the *Grand Monarque*, while as yet the royal star was constantly in the ascendant and its glory untarnished.

In the Memoirs we see a long procession of courtiers, warriors, politicians, wits and savants, a bevy of great ladies, court beauties, adventuresses and courtezans, many of whose names are written large on the page of history. All these people the Duc de Roquelaure met at the French Court upon a very intimate footing, and the lively old aristocrat tells us of the curious intrigues of, and the scandals about, innumerable great personages, sparing nobody, least of all himself. We see, as through a kaleidoscope, all the fascinating details of Court life during the most brilliant and withal careless period of French monarchy: in the midst of all this gaiety the Duke was one of the shining lights. We visit, in his company, the Court, the mansions and country-houses of the nobility, as well as the taverns, bagnios and gaming-houses. We find amusing de-

scriptions of military and official life, and a strange light is thrown upon the secret history of most of the great historical personages of the time, mixed up with the curious details of Roquelaure's very miscellaneous amours. The Duke does not mince matters, he calls a spade a spade, and in most cases the names of the subjects of his *chroniques scandaleuses* are given in full, and are no mere mythical history of fictitious personages vaguely indicated by initials.

Roquelaure led the life of a courtier, soldier, gambler and man about town; he was a practical joker, who was loved and dreaded; in time he was given high military command, and he died governor of a province. The fact of his being upon the most intimate terms with the most celebrated personages of his time at the Court of Versailles, renders his Memoirs the more interesting, as throwing side-lights on the curious manners and morality of the period.

In the time of the Duc de Roquelaure, memoir-writing became a fashion, and was "the occupation of those who, having culture, leisure and opportunity of observation, devoted themselves to the task of recording the deeds of others, and still more of regarding the incidents of the busy, splendid and cultivated, if somewhat frivolous world of the Court, in which, from the time of Louis XIV's majority, the political life of the nation and almost its whole history were centred."

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

The year 1617—Topics of the time—My birth—My father the Marshal—Madame de Roquelaure's fright—The Place de Grève—A common woman's hospitality—The execution of the Chevalier de Sassetôt—The confessor and the penitent—The executioner in danger—Casters of horoscopes—A glance at that calling—Extract from a letter written by Antoine Baron de Roquelaure to the Hungarian Major Ramzer—The assassination of Henri IV.—The grimace of Ravallac—M. Huguelin—My portrait—Am I handsome or ugly?—Uncertainty on that point—I first carry arms—Madame de Lavernay—This lady's attractions—My inexperience—The Marquis de Croixville—A state secret—An amorous <i>tête-à-tête</i> —The nougat from Provence—A supper for three—An evening at M. de D.'s—I am overwhelmed with witticisms—I am beaten off the field—M. de Larochevoucauld's wit at Madame de Lavernay's expense—The "forties"—The illusions of the age of eighteen	I
--	---

CHAPTER II

A glance backwards—King Luynes—An epigram—A good deed done by the devil—The Bishop of Luçon—Sketch—The Cardinal's taste for gallantry—Mademoiselle de Pont-Courlay—Rivalries—War commenced—

	PAGE
Small causes and great effects—The stupid look of the Marquis de Combalet—The Duc d'Eprenon's saying—Madame de S.—A secret revealed —The knee of Marie de Médicis—A trap—The Cardinal in good luck—Unexpected result—The birth of the Dauphin—Is he his father's son?—Absurd tattle—His Eminence's feverish fits—M. de Cinq-Mars—My first campaign—The Comte de Soissons, Madame de Combalet and the poet Neuf-Germain	40

CHAPTER III

The battle of La Marfée—Impressions of my first fight—My answer to the Maréchal de Fabert—The death of the Comte de Soissons—Various accounts—A disaster—I am wounded —An enforced stay at Donchery —The weariness of solitude—The mysterious carriage—I rescue a young and beautiful girl from an unknown danger—A sentimental journey to Reims—The road—Fanfette yawns—The innkeeper and Dr. Mathielmus — Fanfette's stays — A doctor's visit — Singular questions—The ungratifying fee which I paid for the visit of the venerable Mathielmus—A quick way downstairs—Farewell to Fanfette—A stolen kiss—Daydreams	63
--	----

CHAPTER IV

A little confession—Madame de Guéménée besieged—A ball at the Hôtel Grammont—The five competitors—The Prince de Guéménée as a demi-lune—The pavane—D'Andilly's cuff—I throw it in his face—A farcical duel—I wound D'Andilly—Villejuif: Madame de Vaudreuil's country house—Mysterious noises—Madame de Guéménée's reply to my relative La Tour Roquelaure—The broken teaservice—Conjectures—The maid Pelloquin and the groom Rigobert—A voyage of discovery—The Abbé de Gondy—I suspect Madame de Guéménée of a secret understanding with him—My plans for finding out—Madame de Guéménée and Pelloquin one and the same person—I make a desperate

	PAGE
attempt—I encounter a vigorous resistance—A surrender at discretion—A night well used—Embarrassment in the morning—A satisfactory explanation—A humorous meeting at the Tuileries—M. Béchamel—A wager—A kick—My victim thanks me—A breakfast in his honour	87

CHAPTER V

A word about the Abbé de Gondy—Richelieu's terrible pastime—The executioner and Cinq-Mars—M. Méranne d'Amberton—His prophecy about the Cardinal—A distich by Grotius—The battle of Honnecourt—I am taken by the Spaniards—A letter from M. de Voiture—The Castilian captain's mistress—What Richelieu said when he was dying—A souvenir visit to Madame de Lavernay—My successor—I claim the reward for my former services—I am flatly refused—I am sacrificed to the little marquis—My mortification—I swear to be revenged—My meeting with Croixville—Marinelli's wine-shop—Spanish wine—Croixville falls under the table—The hour of the swain—A sleepless night—A billet-doux	119
---	-----

CHAPTER VI

A survey of the year 1643—The floods—An evening at Du Ryer's—Madame C.—The story of M. and Madame Charmontel—The councillor of the Parlement of Rennes—The end of the honeymoon—The husband's extreme coldness—The revival of the lady's sentiments—The attempts—Tears—Coquetry—Trying faithlessness—The Comte de Chamblard— <i>In flagrante delicto</i> —Charmontel not to be moved—M. and Madame Biassou—The innocent Abbé Guibert—A surprise—The admirable composure of a grammarian—A lesson in grammar	152
---	-----

CHAPTER VII

M. de Brancas—His absent-mindedness—The wig—Madoiselle Garnier—The blessing—Strange disappearance	
---	--

	PAGE
of the husband—Anxiety—The bride's regrets—Sad dreams—Contrast—The little letter—A dainty supper—M. de Barillon—We save Brancas from himself—He returns to his duty—A wedding night—Gomberville—All set right—The Abbé de Mauroy—The stolen spectacles—M. de Lesdiguières—The levée of Anne of Austria—A remark repeated—My connection with Bassompierre—Portrait—The principles of French gallantry—A model to follow—Reflections—M. de Valazé—His imaginary terrors—Other queer characters—M. and Madame Lombard—Cornet Restaud—The husband's jealousy—The lady's simplicity—A grotesque vow made on a death-bed	168

CHAPTER VIII

A walk in the Place Royale—Chapelain—D'Alibon: ex-tax collector—A long yawn—D'Alibon again—My wish about his lady's virtue—A quarrel between the pair—A challenge—An invitation to dinner—Hostile intentions—I am warned in time—The advice given me by Courcelles—I appear upon the scene—I am regarded as a curiosity—My plan of vengeance—A discussion about me—At table—Cross firing—My appetite—Disappointment—Madame de Buysard—Cicero as a preacher—Simplicity—General amazement—My reputation lost—D'Alibon and his friends withdraw to avoid laughing in my face—I am left alone with the lady—Reaction—She begins with indignation and works round to pity—Pity akin to love—The blind down—Consolation—Madame d'Alibon owed me the reparation—A pleasant time—The husband is content—The lady is well pleased—Everyone is satisfied—Madame de Rambouillet—Fresh successes of the Duc d'Enghien—The carp and the pike—Another piece of insolence from D'Alibon—I charitably give him a word of advice	190
---	-----

CHAPTER IX

I stay with M. de Lesdiguières—At Grand-Mesnil—A breakfast—A singular dessert—The Chevalier de Bireuil—A	
--	--

	PAGE
merry wight—A mournful presence—An approaching marriage—M. de Lesdiguières and I are to be the bridegroom's friends—Bireuil unbosoms himself—The history of his amour with the fair Vanina Betucci—A portrait of the Italian girl—A declaration—Her family—Disappointment and resentment—Flora, the servant—The naval officer—An assignation at night—The key—An abominable treachery—A fatal interview—Vanina's despair—The surprise	220

CHAPTER X

Vanina's History continued—Her father—M. de Bireuil astounded—A mystery disclosed—Flora's part in it—The guilty one forgiven—The conditions of the pardon—Bireuil accepts them—Vanina's resignation—Preparing for happiness—Painful suspense—We go to Provins—A melancholy visit—A joyous marriage—My singular presentiment in Church—The return home—Alarming symptoms—Confidences—A tragic ending—We console Bireuil as best we can—Farewell to the country—We return to Grand-Mesnil—Madame de Lesdiguières—This lady's opinion of me—Lesdiguières as my advocate—I make a strange resolve—A journey with a charming woman—Gallantry by night—A fool's prudence—It is taken in ill part—The lady's letter to her husband—The postscript—I mean to have my revenge—A visit to the Princesse de Guéménée—Mazarin at the Palais-Royal	243
---	-----

CHAPTER XI

A night with Bois-Robert—Basset—Bad at play—I win ten thousand crowns—Debtor and creditor	267
---	-----

CHAPTER XII

A little clique—My occupations by day and by night—A word about La Calprenède—The Abbé de Persan's view of him—Il Signor Giulio—My attachment to him—"Les Importants"—My answer to the Marquis de Mortemart—Secret attacks of my enemies—The Prince befriends me—Beaufort's disgrace—He is sent to the	
--	--

	PAGE
Bastille—Mad amours—Madame de Pélussin—Portrait of her—A spot on the sun—An incurable blemish—The Abbé de Cérès's observation—Buquet d'Andail—His avarice—He asks Bautru to dinner—Such a dinner!—The skeleton—What M. Angevins said—A trap—Bautru takes his vengeance in an epigram . . .	272

CHAPTER XIII

The posture of affairs— <i>Ennui</i> , a malady of pretty women—The cure suggested by Mazarin—An installation at the Palais-Royal—Corneille—Production of <i>Rodogune</i> —Madame de Pommeuse—This lady's qualities—Monsieur de Guise, the grandson of Balafré—Marshal the Duke d'Aumont—Mademoiselle de Pons—Huguelin again—Attack and reply—A quarrel at cards—The pack thrown in the face of a player—The duel—An unexpected spectator—I take charge of a pretty girl in a fainting fit—The two wounded combatants—Satisfactory explanations—All ends for the best—Cyrano-Bergerac—A scene from Agrippina—The happy lovers—Villars and Ninon de l'Enclos—D'Aumont cured . . .	290
--	-----

CHAPTER XIV

Three months at Grand-Mesnil—M. de Magnancourt's mania—The fearful consequences that sometimes ensued from it—His scheme about me—Mademoiselle Thérèse d'Oysanville—A faithful sketch—The word marriage—Perturbing effect of it on me—M. de Magnancourt's efforts—The love of liberty—A serious communication—An avowal by deputy—What is to be done?—Embarrassment—I resolve on a grievous sacrifice—Sinister joy of the schemer—An interview secured with difficulty—Sad figure cut by the two lovers—A new kind of declaration—Mutual satisfaction—A vow of friendship—M. de Magnancourt owns he is beaten—Concerning the contradictory tendencies in love—Judicious reflections on this point—The mystery of the heart. . .	318
---	-----

SECRET MEMOIRS

OF THE

DUC DE ROQUELAURE

CHAPTER I

The year 1617—Topics of the time—My birth—My father the Marshal—Madame de Roquelaure's fright—The Place de Grève—A common woman's hospitality—The execution of the Chevalier de Sassetôt—The confessor and the penitent—The executioner in danger—Casters of horoscopes—A glance at that calling—Extract from a letter written by Antoine Baron de Roquelaure to the Hungarian Major Ramzer—The assassination of Henri IV.—The grimace of Ravallac—M. Huguelin—My portrait—Am I handsome or ugly?—Uncertainty on that point—I first carry arms—Madame de Lavernay—This lady's attractions—My inexperience—The Marquis de Croixville—A state secret—An amorous *tête-à-tête*—The nougat from Provence—A supper for three—An evening at M. de D.'s—I am overwhelmed with witticisms—I am beaten off the field—M. de Laroche-foucauld's wit at Madame de Lavernay's expense—The "forties"—The illusions of the age of eighteen.

THE year 1617 was beyond question one of the most prolific of important events and of every kind of agitation that the century has witnessed. I do not say this because it was the year of my birth—my

self-conceit does not reach to that point; but it seems to me that there is no excessive indulgence in honouring with the title "famous" a period which within so small a compass of time showed us such incidents as the disgrace of Marie de Médicis, the murder of the Maréchal d'Ancre, the execution of Leonor de Galigai, the Cevennes war, Barneveldt's exploits in Holland, the Spanish conspiracy at Venice, and in the Christian world the double jubilee of the Catholics and the Protestants. Such influences were reigning when I first drew breath.

If my birth cannot be ranked with these remarkable events—and that I heartily avow—it is none the less true that my introduction to this lower world took place at a time when great things were in the wind, and around my cradle were plenty of movement and plenty of noise.

Well, then, I was born in 1617, son to Antoine, Baron de Roquelaure, whose innumerable titles and still more innumerable good qualities I will not here mention, seeing that for a gentleman the important point is not to found his nobility on many parchments, but to justify it by fair and honourable deeds; and of this obligation I may well say that my father acquitted himself in such manner as to satisfy the most critical and to win the good opinion of all the men of worth of his age. His high reputation was a part of the estate which he left me, and I have striven to keep possession of it with faithful

zeal, that in my turn I may deliver it intact to my descendants. Have I succeeded in fulfilling this duty? Posterity must answer that question . . . but if I should here reveal my inmost thought and speak without bombast, I believe that posterity will be less severe in his case than in mine, and will less esteem my character than his. I am a filial man, and will not complain of this apportionment. He was a better man than I, and though his disposition was affectionate and merry, yet upon necessity he brought to the consideration of business that thorough seriousness of which men of policy stand in so much need; this quality I have never been able to graft upon my character, which is essentially prone to satire and levity. This, I know well, will afford the material of an undying reproach against me. But I have my consolation for it, since, after full consideration, I would not have sacrificed a single one of those rare sportive times that have fallen to my lot in the past for the dubious expectation of passing for a Cato in the future. It is my nature not to wish to purchase the finest reputation in the world at the price of twenty-four hours of tediousness.

It will surprise no one if I pass lightly over the first period of my life. I know but by hearsay the little I could tell, and the wailings of one child are so like those of another, the gamut of their cries is everywhere and always so invariable, that I will

not set myself to renew for the kindly reader the torture of so discordant a music and of so deafening a noise. I doubt not I was as tricky and rebellious as any other child in long clothes, and I must further conclude, judging by what I have been since, that it was abundantly difficult to get a few minutes' quiet and rest with me, even at that quite passive phase of my life.

Since we are at this heading, I may go back a little further, and acquaint you with an incident which preceded my birth. My mother, when eight months with child, had occasion to go one day to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. As far as I can recollect, she had gone to visit a friend of hers whom a sort of disgrace unjustly endured at Court had so forcibly afflicted in body and in mind that she had fallen ill of it and died a month later. It was three o'clock; my mother was returning very quietly in her sedan-chair, and the carriers, aware of her condition, had moderated their pace with right good-will, when upon reaching the Rue Saint-Paul they were suddenly stopped by the moving stream of a huge crowd which seemed to flow out from the surrounding parts. My mother gave the order to pass forward. The carriers, being of a curious turn, and hoping to satisfy their curiosity, were all agog to push ahead. But when Madame de Roquelaure understood, from certain expressions which she caught amid the turmoil, that an exe-

cution was afoot, she countermanded her first order and cried to the carriers to turn back. Unfortunately this was now impossible. The crowd had become so dense that the chair could get no further, whether to the right or left. Thereupon a poor common woman seemed to take pity on my mother's plight, and invited her to come up to her dwelling, there to await the end of the incident. The offer was too welcome to be refused, and my mother eagerly followed her obliging hostess.

Now conceive the horror of Madame de Roquelaure when, after with difficulty ascending four steep flights of stairs, she entered a room which composed the old woman's sole dwelling and looked out full upon the Place de Grève. My mother gave vent to a cry, for she abhorred all dreadful sights; and yet her eyes (a matter that she could never explain to herself) were drawn with a sort of involuntary curiosity to the scaffold erected in the middle of the square, and such was her abeyance of mind and will at that time that nothing could have withdrawn her from that painful view.

"Oh," said a quavering voice behind her, "you will see finely from here."

My mother turned round, and perceived that it was the old woman who had spoken. The pale and wrinkled countenance which but now had appeared to express kindness and good-will, suddenly seemed to bear the impress of an inexpressible

baseness mingled with avarice. The crone failed to perceive the piercing intelligence of my mother's glance, and added :

"Be sure, I shouldn't have let everybody have my window, but I saw that the pretty lady was one of the quality."

Mistake was impossible: the woman had been trying to make a bargain of it. Madame de Roque-laure afterwards recounted that she was then seized with a violent qualmishness—and not without cause, especially after the tender emotion aroused in her by this hospitality when seemingly proffered with so much grace and spontaneousness; but my mother gradually regained her courage and asked, though with a trembling voice :

"Who is coming? What poor wretch is it . . ."

"That they are going to hurry into the other world? Oh, the worst of all criminals, pretty lady. A heretic who has well deserved his fate. He is one De Sassetôt, a chevalier, accused of having perverted young ladies of quality and stolen the treasure in ten cathedrals. It's sacrilege, you see; and there'll be joy in heaven this evening."

The old woman went on speaking, but my mother no longer listened to her. The victim had just entered the Grève, and the acclamations of the crowd had resounded from every side at once. Like all the condemned under this sentence, the Chevalier de Sassetôt was seated in a dirty cart, drawn back-

wards, and accompanied by a friar repeating paternosters in his ear. This man fulfilled his function with much zeal and exactness; but Sassetôt, a hardened offender no doubt, paid very little attention to him. He looked right and left, smiled to the women at the balconies, and bowed with an air of patronage to the row of halberdiers drawn up along the way. In the eyes of all such conduct in this man was a proof of great equanimity and inconceivable self-command. Pity for him was already spreading, and the premature death of a gentleman whose courage and steadfastness might certainly have been employed in a more useful and less melancholy fashion was being deplored, when of a sudden, upon arriving at the scaffold, he changed his mien and yielded to indescribable fury. The friar, as a man of peace and reconciliation before all things, endeavoured to recall him to calmness and resignation. The Chevalier de Sassetôt fiercely snatched his hood off, seized him about the middle and flung him from the top to the bottom of the scaffold. The whole square was filled with uproar. As luck would have it the poor monk had but his shoulder put out and his nose slightly injured. Folk ran to his aid. Then the Chevalier de Sassetôt, taking advantage of this diversion, laid hold of the executioner, bit him hard in the neck, and beyond doubt would have then and there strangled him if eight or ten stout men-at-arms had

not put a stop to his rage. These different incidents hastened the execution. Sassetôt was condemned to be broken alive upon the wheel. The instruments of this punishment were brought up. . . . The executioner rubbed his hands, the crowd pressed up closer, and . . .

We heard no more. My mother had cast her purse on the mantelpiece of the horrible old woman, and, when she had got down the stairs, she knew not how, she had the luck to find her chair again. She returned home more dead than alive, and ill . . . there is scarce need to mention it. Two days later she gave birth to a child, myself, and I can say that the character of that child never suffered from the effects of the trial to which it was submitted in the mother's womb, and before its own life began.

After such a shock as this it is not surprising that the idea of having my horoscope cast found favour. Recourse was had to certain sibyls of repute and certain oracles highly esteemed in Paris. Some declared that I should be a great poet; others asserted that I should take a place near the throne. Some were of the opinion that I should become king, and as they were richly paid, all agreed in saying that I should be the handsomest fellow in the world and should live beyond a hundred years.

Not a single one had guessed what I should really be.

My mother's weakness for the horoscope wizards was natural enough, and can easily be explained by the very nature of the ways of that age. How should she resist this whim—for such it was—when people belauded in earnest the astonishing feats of the famous Parafre, who manufactured talismans of false diamonds and love-amulets of unfailing efficacy? Under Henri IV. and Louis XIII. not a girl would have been found who did not believe in the mysterious potency of a flower plucked before sunrise. Even a leaf of clover was enough to make the charm work well.

No doubt the magicians, sorcerers and prophets guessed wrong oftener than right. Yet, in spite of their continual errors, these worthy folk secured comfortable revenues. . . . But it must be added that, since the notable punishment of the Maréchal d'Ancre in particular, they were no longer resorted to, save in secret, and they remained in concealment as much as possible. The gibbet, the stake and the scaffold are jests so grim that they thought twice before satisfying the inquisitive, and only dealt with trusted customers. After all, what was their crime? They distilled from certain credulous gentlemen coins which they would otherwise have lost at lansquenet. . . . Instead of punishing them as heretics or thieves, why should not those in authority have given them the pardon which is extended to beggars? They had examples in high places. Did not the mother

of Henri III. profess the science, the pretended mysteries of which Ruggieri revealed to her? Did not she carry a skin of vellum, or, as others have it, of a flayed child, on her stomach, whereon letters, signs and figures were thickly traced, as well as a talisman which had been compounded for her by the famous Regnier? Did not Marie de Médicis even in the time of her exile always keep among her suite a sorcerer called (I think) Fabroni? In deference to such distinguished examples some indulgence, as it seems to me, might have been extended to the magicians, and I thoroughly incline to the system since followed by M. d'Argenson, who looked upon them but as clever thieves of whom it was well to rid the capital, though they certainly were not worthy of the distinction of being burned.

Now we are upon the question of magicians, I cannot omit to relate a fact which my father was fond of recounting, because he had been a witness of it, and it had made a strong impression upon him. I had it from my mother, for I was too young to hear it from my father's lips. He used to say that in the year 1595 or 1596 (I forget which) a magician from the Low Countries had declared, amidst a considerable company, that the King, Henri IV., would be killed in his bed in the following year, but if this prophecy failed of accomplishment, yet his Majesty would be unable to avoid a tragic fate, and that, after many fruitless efforts, his enemies

would fulfil their object. This foreigner left France, and no doubt all those who had heard him forgot his words, my father excepted, whose anxiety was increased by the unbounded affection which he ever had for the Bearnais. This prediction of the magician was indeed falsified as concerned its immediate fulfilment, but was entirely justified by the events of the following years. In 1597 an upholsterer of the Rue du Temple, being convicted of the intention to murder the king, was hung in the Place de Grève and his body burned to ashes. Two years later the king received direct warning from a capuchin of Milan, named Honorio, that some rascal had set out to cut his throat in Paris. In 1600 the woman Nicole Mignon wrote to the Comte de Soissons, the *grand maître* of France, to demand a secret interview with him. She could, she said, show him an infallible method of becoming the most important and powerful prince in the world. The count, surprised at this strange proposal, granted her a meeting in order to question her more at his ease. She waited upon him and, without beating about the bush, strongly urged M. de Soissons to place her husband in the royal kitchen, promising him as the price of this favour to rid him of the king within a week by means of a subtle poison. By good luck M. de Léomenie was in an adjoining room and heard all. Nicole Mignon was at once arrested and her trial was speedily brought to a conclusion.

Other attempts were made, but I hasten on to the disaster which fulfilled the prophecy of the Netherlands astrologer. This no doubt is a familiar matter to all; but my father's account of it has nevertheless that authority which belongs to narratives written by eye-witnesses. I give an extract from a letter which he wrote on this subject to a Hungarian, Major Ramzer, the original of which was returned to our family at the death of the latter by his testamentary executor. The Maréchal de Bassompierre also had a copy.

“A fatal day has arisen upon France. It is the 14th of this month of May, 1610. This morning, about ten o'clock, the King went to hear mass at the Feuillants, where he appeared, as usual, intent on his devotions. As he came out he met the Duc de Guise and Bassompierre coming to meet him. Henri joked with his courtiers, but with so constrained a manner and so pensive an air that it might be asserted his Majesty had a presentiment. He spent the rest of the day in somewhat better spirits. But at dinner the King again became a prey to melancholy, and after displaying much indecision, as not knowing what he should do to free himself from the depression which possessed him, he announced that he would set out for the Arsenal to visit the Duc de Sully there. The carriage being ready, he quitted the Louvre without breaking

silence. The gentlemen who accompanied his Majesty were the Duc de Montbazon, the Maréchal de Lavardie, De Laforce, the Duc d'Epéron, Mirebeau, Liancourt, and myself. He instructed M. de Vitry, captain of the guard, to go to the palace and there superintend the arrangements for the Queen's arrival, which was very shortly expected.

"The weather being fine, the two windows of the carriage were left open. Truly there are fatal circumstances which no man can prevent or foresee. While passing between the Rue Saint-Honoré and the Rue de la Ferronnerie, the carriage was stopped by two laden waggons which were blocking the street. This obstruction caused the greater part of the attendants to proceed into the Cemetery of the Innocents. Of the two servants who remained, one advanced to order the waggons which were impeding the King's progress to back, and the other chanced to stoop to refasten his garter.

"Then it was, my dear Ramzer, that God abandoned us. The King was at this moment bereft of his guard. On a sudden a man, placing his foot on one of the hind wheels, stretched out his hand towards the King and stabbed him with a poniard between the second and third rib, a little above the heart. We rushed to his Majesty's aid, we hustled the assassin aside, and formed a shield for our master with our bodies. But this skilled murderer

was able to direct a second blow at Henri's heart. He struck, and at the very moment his mouth was distorted by a hideous grimace which Montbazon and I alone remarked. It gave to his face the expression which we usually attribute to the devils or the damned.

"This monster is called Ravailac. The victim died immediately. I was instructed, in company with certain trustworthy gentlemen, to spread through the town the news of a recovery of the King. Our hearts bled as we gave vent to this false report . . . but it was necessary for the welfare of the kingdom and the quiet of the capital. Still in the quarters that are remote from the Louvre are heard the cries, 'Long live the King!' It is a cry that hurts me."

I shall say no more upon a too familiar theme, and one which is, so to say, foreign to my own affairs. But I have yielded to the wish to quote some fragments of a correspondence, afterwards made public, of the late Duc de Roquelaure, and no one will take in ill part this homage of a son to the memory of his father.

I return to myself.

From my earliest days I gave specimens of that jesting nature which afterwards obtained for me so much approbation and so much inimical criticism. My mother used often to remind me, among other

matters of this sort, that I once made a string of answers to an old salt-tax receiver which split the company into two camps, the one taking my side, the other much scandalised at my forwardness. I was then thirteen, and here is the incident :

I had but lately been admitted into my mother's salon, and among the visitors whom I had chanced to meet, M. Huguelin was one of those who pleased me least. He was a poor old fellow who had the foible of thinking himself a great wit, and who, not content with his huge fortune—I do not well know how he had made it—was determined at all costs to pass for a good-natured wag. I have often seen him since, and I may say that I never knew a man whose merriment was sadder. He never uttered anything without first giving vent to one of those stupid laughs whose inevitable effect is to put you on guard against a joke which is usually neither funny nor capable of being made so.

Thus heavy-witted, he took himself to be the finest, most delicate, and briskest hand at rallying another in the world. That night he had several times made trial of me, and as he supposed he should find a child of thirteen an easy victim, he followed his inclination to his heart's content. I saw that he wished to make a fool of me; but I kept countenance, and though he designedly tackled subjects above my years, I answered without awkwardness, leading him on by my questions, for

I said that I only wished to be instructed, and should be very grateful for lessons of any kind that were given me.

"This fine young fellow," said Huguelin, speaking to an elderly lady who was near him, "seems to me disposed to learn more than others want to tell him. The professor for *him* must be a clever one."

"If that's so," I replied impudently, "I should not make choice of you, M. Huguelin."

"Oh, so we try to joke," said the salt-tax receiver with a grin.

"You pay me a very poor compliment, M. Huguelin. *Try* to joke! That's only needful for those to whom wit comes hard."

"And I suppose you think it comes easily to you, Master Presumption?"

"Well, I think it does, M. Huguelin, when I talk with you."

Huguelin compressed his lips. But he soon resumed :

"We are still very young. What do we want to learn at our age, my dear little M. de Roquelaure?"

"What you have no further occasion to know at yours, M. Huguelin."

The laughter was all on my side, and the sharpness of my answers was loudly applauded. From that day onward I had no occasion to complain of

the sallies of M. Huguelin. Let us now pass over a space of some years.

Young and naturally impetuous, descended from one of the most ancient families of Armagnac and the sole male heir to the name of Roquelaure, since the death of the marshal at Lectoure in 1625, I was certainly in a most favourable position for success of all kinds. I early became skilled with the sword I carried, and this passport opened for me the doors of the noblest houses in my most youthful days, and secured me the key of certain boudoirs where the soldierly art was in very good odour, and here—a precious boon to one who has not yet reached his twenties—I found several charitable souls who consented, without demanding too rigorous entreaty, to finish my education.

Here is the right place for what I might call my portrait, if one could depict oneself without being at least suspected of indulgence or partiality. All I can in conscience do is to repeat honestly what has been said of my face, to sketch some of the features as well as I can, and to relate frankly what I thought of it myself. Perhaps the truth may be constructed from these various and opposed points of view. Moreover, it is well to remember that at the moment when I take the brush to limn—or rather to daub—my likeness, I am in quiet retirement in my government of Guienne—which is a way of letting it appear that I long since bade adieu to youth, and

that on the heading which is now to occupy us my good faith can be implicitly trusted.

I passed for a very ugly man. And I must avow that certain portraits in oil and pastel, cooked up by artists who assuredly bore me a grudge, and which may still be seen in some good houses both in Paris and Versailles, were altogether adapted to set that ill reputation on a solid basis. . . . So soon as my ugliness had become an accepted fact, and, so to say, proverbial, hungry poetasters and eager caricaturists made it their theme, the former in rhymes which daily made me sore, the latter by grotesque exaggerations which had a certain humour in them, and at which I admit I myself have often laughed.

But must it be concluded from this that I was ugly in the full meaning of the word? . . . On this point I give some indications among which the reader may pick and choose. My forehead was neither high nor broad, neither small nor large. Doubtless the oval of my face was not of a faultless contour, but the lower part ended in a sort of taper depression which is peculiar to the hump-backed and which lends to the face an indisputable air of finesse and wit. My eyes were keen, piercing and luminous, and seemed to see much further than certain people usually wished them to. My mouth was large, but, especially when I was young, I had a set of teeth the whiteness of which was one of the qualities,

with the whiteness of my hands, that women themselves more than once envied me. My weakest point was certainly my nose, which is a little too snub to be praised or rehabilitated; so I will not attempt the task. Future generations must think what they like of it. The portrait I have given is unquestionably not that of the Pythian Apollo nor of the beautiful Antinous. . . . But I persist in saying (and it will be understood that I have my reasons for doing so) that I was rather outside the conventional lines of human beauty than among the ranks of the really ugly. No one considered me handsome . . . but then I need not be of the opinion of everybody else, and I should add that several ladies of taste were good enough to confirm me in my opinion.

Perhaps this would be the place to speak of my military studies and of the joy I felt when I learned that I had obtained a formal promise of a company of horse; but these details have but an inferior interest for the public, and I rather yield to the desire to devote some lines to the first emotion that stirred my heart. The remembrance of it, enfeebled by much formidable competition in the course of time, yet remains very clear in my mind.

It was in 1637. I was twenty years old, and I was in Paris. Owing to some circumstance that has now faded from my memory, I was taken one night to the house of a certain Madame de Lavernay, the

widow of a husband who no doubt had died for the express purpose of leaving her free. With every circumstance of comfort, she lived the life of a woman who knows what is due to the world, her family, and heaven. She entertained in good style, and, so far as appearances went, did nothing to compromise the name which others bore besides herself, and never sinned without going on the morrow, at latest, to beg absolution at the confessional. She had a stately mien, and there was in her whole personality something at once candid and winsome, which immediately compelled attention and respect. She was a piquant brunette, with bright and well-formed eyes, and her face seemed to flash a light which certainly had not the imposing quality of the saintly aureola, but had the strongest attraction for the night moths. She had pretty teeth, a fine white skin, and shapeliness above the average; and, to close this somewhat stilted description, her manners matched her attractions, and seemed the outcome of good education.

Was more wanted to complete the seduction of a neophyte who was at his first *débuts*, and who was burning to experience the amorous encounter and his initiation? I succumbed at my first sight of her, and my second glance made me her slave. At the end of a few days my passion had increased to the formidable proportions of a chronic malady. I lost appetite, dreamed much more than I slept, and

was on the point of returning my captain's commission to the Minister of War. I was mad, and I lived on my madness. And then consider that this feverish and agitated state might be prolonged indefinitely; for if I was terribly in love, I was still more terribly shy. I trembled if I did but feel Madame de Lavernay's dress sweep against me, and I seriously believed that upon the first liberty I should allow myself with her, my exile would be immediately decreed. I was incredibly innocent then, and Cardinal de Retz certainly could not have addressed to me the reproach which he addressed later to M. de Larochefoucauld, that I did not believe sufficiently in virtue.

I believed in it too much. Madame de Lavernay discovered this eccentricity in me, and did her best, I must avow to her glory, to undeceive me. One night—and this circumstance struck me so strongly that I even recall the colour of the sofa on which we were seated—one night the little company which usually met at her house had withdrawn at an earlier hour than usual. They were induced to retire thus early by a kind of agitation which had spread in Paris as the result of a disturbance of little importance promoted by certain malcontents in the neighbourhood of the Cardinal de Richelieu's mansion. Only one guest besides myself remained late, the Marquis de Croixville, a handsome fellow enough, in spite of his short stature, but one whom

I supremely disliked, and detested the more that I supposed he had claims, or at the least aims, upon the heart of Madame de Lavernay. When I saw the others leave, I pleased myself with the hope of being alone with her. So M. de Croixville was filching this splendid opportunity from me, a chance that I longed for, yet was not sure that I could take due advantage of, for I confess to my shame that I was as shy as a girl. Did Madame de Lavernay guess this secret torment of mine? I do not know, but may well think so, to judge by the little scene that succeeded between us three, and which left me master of the field. We began by hiding a yawn now and then, like people who weary of one another's company, and by speaking of things not worth mention, as those do who have nothing in reality to say. But soon Madame de Lavernay changed her plan, and began to talk politics. She knew that M. de Croixville was hostile to the Cardinal, and though not herself at heart devoted either to the minister or to the Queen, she was enthusiastic upon the marquis's side. Croixville was delighted, and enjoyed his triumph untroubled by a doubt, for I took very little part in the conversation, and the marquis had it all to himself.

On a sudden Madame de Lavernay struck her forehead with the air of a person who is reminded of something very important.

"What's the matter?" asked the little marquis.

"On my writing-table," said she, "I have a message that I was writing to the Lady Superior of Val-de-Grace, and with inexcusable silliness I have forgotten to send it. Serious interests are concerned. . . . It is information that I had positively promised her . . . and that concerns the Queen's safety. . . . She will never forgive me for forgetting it."

"Though I have never been to Val-de-Grace," I broke in, rising, "I know the way thither perfectly, and if the offer of a swift and discreet messenger could serve you . . ."

"Not to be thought of," Madame de Lavernay replied quickly. "They have never seen you, and they distrust faces they do not know. You would have the greatest possible difficulty in gaining admittance. . . . But if I dared to beg M. de Croixville."

"I? I shall be proud to undertake the mission. And if you think me worthy of it . . ."

"Here is the letter," resumed Madame de Lavernay, handing the little marquis a paper folded in the fashion of a *billet-doux*—which, by the way, seemed odd enough for a dispatch containing a State secret. "The Lady Superior of Val-de-Grace, as you know, is of the noble family of Pont-Carré. She is an excellent woman, strongly attached to the young Queen, and in consequence cordially hates Richelieu. I will not tell you more; take this

quickly, and return as you went. We shall wait for you."

The little marquis seemed affected by this mark of distinction, and strutted with importance in the most laughable manner conceivable. He was bursting with pride. He asked no more, and went away happy. Had he been nominated to the Embassy in Turkey or in Spain, he would not have carried his head in the air with greater arrogance.

"Heavens, madam," I cried when the Marquis de Croixville had left, "are you engaged in a conspiracy?"

"I? Not the least in the world."

"They say that Richelieu is so vindictive. You will compromise yourself."

"I hope not."

"And yet this mysterious message . . ."

"Is composed in such a way that I defy the most subtle doctors and the most minute inquiry to find anything to say against it."

"Then why these injunctions of prudence?"

"I had to rouse the imagination of the marquis . . ."

"But why?"

"To get him on his legs. . . . It is a long way from here to the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, and his courage might have failed."

"But what object had you?"

"What object?"

Madame de Lavernay smiled as she repeated these two words. Then approaching me with a charming familiarity which could not fail to touch me keenly:

"You must have a very stubborn mind if you do not understand an idea which is yours as much as mine. . . . An idea that I guessed in your eyes . . . which are, you know, two masters of indiscretion. . . . Really, did little De Croixville amuse you much? Must I tell you in plain words that I had, like you, the greatest interest in his going."

There are gestures that add such eloquent explanations to words that no other commentary is needed. Unless one is deaf, blind, or wilfully obstinate, one is compelled to see, to understand, and to surrender at discretion.

I fell on my knees before Madame de Lavernay, resolved to win a great advantage at all hazards. Unfortunately I was not yet habituated to such skirmishes, and my powers were far below the level of my good intentions. I stuck. My arms were nerveless, my tongue articulated confused sounds, and I suppose that for two or three minutes I resembled one of those marble statues to be seen in the royal gardens to which all the perfections of art cannot give expression and life. Certainly I was a long way off ideal perfection, and, moreover, I did not move. I was madly angry with myself. What must I look like? What I wanted to do was

certainly much better than what I was doing. But could she guess it, and had not she the right to exact something more than ineffectual protestations and useless transports? I saw the barrier, but I dared not leap it, or rather, like an unskilled groom, I dared not give my mount the last and decisive touch of the spurs. And yet at all hazards I was bound to get out of this situation, which was at once tiresome, ridiculous and embarrassing. What course was I to take? The vigour for deeds, the power to act, still evaded me. So I took refuge in words, and became eloquent. I inwardly uttered an invocation to the guardian deity of lovers . . . I sought in every corner and crevice of my brain-box for something abrupt enough to astonish her and impassioned enough to touch her heart. If at that moment I could have improvised a few bad verses, a contemptible quatrain even, I think I should have felt prouder than the great Turenne after a victory or Richelieu after a triumph of policy. But verses do not come in these cases without preparation, and it happened that I had never composed a rhyme. So I had to abandon this method of seduction and fall back upon a prose improvisation. So much good-will could not fail of a result, and I finished by declaring, while I pressed Madame de Lavernay's hand with an excess of enthusiasm perhaps :

“You are the angel that I have so often longed

for, madam. My heart beats so strongly that I no longer recognise whether I am awake, alive, or sleeping, and . . . Ah, if at this instant you were but with me in the recesses of some wood . . .”

“In the recesses of some wood,” she repeated, falling into a languorous, reclining attitude. “So you want to cut my throat?”

The phrase enlightened me. I had been talking rubbish, without considering the sense of my words; but my lame sentence had been so naïvely, yet wittily taken, that I saw at once what line I had to take. And I received all the help which the case permitted. Madame de Lavernay had taken a step towards me; I took one towards her. Our hands met—by chance, of course. My knee pressed hers—by accident or design I can scarce tell. Be that as it may, we came closer and closer; we were so near one another that a kiss, I think, was the result. . . . A delightful familiarity suddenly arose between us . . . and yet I could not altogether believe in my rival’s retreat, and from time to time I cast an anxious glance towards the door through which he had disappeared.

“Do not be disturbed,” said Madame de Lavernay in charming tones; “he will not return yet. First there is the time he must spend on the way, and then the time while he awaits an answer.”

“But—what was really in the letter?”

“Do you want to know? Well, then, I will

satisfy your curiosity," replied Madame de Lavernay, with an air that was at once comic and solemn. "Yesterday, when I visited Madame de Chevreuse, I learned that our dear abbess had that morning received a splendid Provence nougat freshly consigned from Marseilles, and of such a size that she would never get to the end of it if her kind friends did not help her to eat it. Woman as I am, I love nougat, and I wrote a line to ask for a piece."

"And that is the message with which you charged M. de Croixville?"

"And we shall see how he discharges his duty."

"But you have fooled him!"

"And you are angry with me?"

"Very far from it. But at first I thought . . . I fancied . . ."

"What?"

"That you had a liking for him, an inclination towards him."

"It is not surprising that you thought you saw what was not there, since you did not see what was there. Before deciding to be jealous, would it not have been more reasonable to try to assure yourself of my love."

"But hear me," I answered, that I might not seem to part with my jealousy too easily; "the marquis is of a good appearance . . ."

"Oh, yes indeed! A little dumpy fellow, of a vile figure, with short legs and an expressionless

face; his eye is dull, his fresh complexion that of a parish beadle. I have never tolerated this paltry marquis, with his middle-class air of prosperity and good health."

"Then why did you encourage his attentions and his visits?"

Madame de Lavernay looked at me in astonishment.

"Poor boy!" she said; "where have you lived—whence have you come? You have not the least idea what a woman of the fashionable world of Paris is. Do you suppose we dismiss a man whom we dislike, or a woman whom we hate? Why, it would be no worse to break with the whole of society at once. No, no, my friend, for us the charm of life consists in the perpetual friction of the most insufferable caprices, the silliest rivalries, the grossest slanders, the meanest passions, and we should certainly die of consumption if we had not all those bothers!"

"And suppose I should only add to the number of your bothers?" I whispered to her.

I think I have already said that Madame de Lavernay was more eloquent in actions than in words, and that she had a way of her own of imposing silence upon questioners, by answering all their objections in such manner as to scatter all their doubts.

At last the little marquis returned. This result

could not be avoided. We heard the horses of his carriage pawing the ground in the courtyard of the house, and the noise—which brought back to our minds the thought of the nougat—caused both in Madame de Lavernay and in me one of those inextinguishable fits of laughter to which Homer has given his name. After this little outbreak, which was an absolutely needful relief, we resumed our seriousness, and awaited M. de Croixville in a proper spirit. He appeared, his hat in one hand and in the other a little cherry-wood box inlaid with rosewood, which he immediately handed to Madame de Lavernay.

“That is well,” she said as she took it, “I know what is here; and now, M. de Croixville,” she added, ringing for her chamber-woman, “you will do me the pleasure of supping with me; M. de Roquelaure will join us. In the next room I have an admirable nougat from Provence which I must have you taste, and you must moisten it with some excellent Spanish wine from the cellars of M. de Jaquelot.

She left him no time to reply, but went out, doubtless to hand the nougat to the butler. In a few minutes she returned, and supper was served. A delightful gaiety reigned at the repast, and M. de Croixville, who showed a hearty appetite, never suspected that he had compromised his dignity by going to fetch one of the dishes.

Perhaps I have dwelt already at considerable

length on a connection which was of slight importance and had no consequences; and yet I feel that I must end the story by giving an incident which may serve to throw some little light on the mind of a celebrated man whose name I have already had occasion to mention, and who will reappear more than once in the course of these memoirs. . . . I mean M. de Laroche-foucauld.

Six months passed and did not cool my passion for Madame de Lavernay, and people began to talk very freely about it, not as being interested about that lady's virtue, but because they were astonished to see me so faithful; and because in the world in which we live the wind set then, as it almost always does, towards carelessness and frivolity. I was regarded—seriously—as a monstrous exception.

One night I arrived in the sprucest of toilettes at M. de D——'s (I suppress his name designedly, for he is still living, and, since the devil has turned monk in his case, I am fearful of vexing him if I recall to him those worldly memories which he has doubtless vowed to forget). M. de D—— was then a rake, and took advantage of the fact that he was married to a wife whom he never saw in private, to receive the brightest feminine company at his house. All these ladies were not exactly addicted to gallantry, but of a moderated virtue, which, as all the world knows, does not imply that they lacked grace and beauty. So the most

distinguished men were to be found in great force at the house of M. de D——. There was a numerous company when I made my entry into the salon, and no doubt my triumphant manner, my lively look, my scornfully rebellious air—my whole personality, in a word, revealed unmistakably whence I came, for all addressed me with a smile of intelligence, pressed my hand and complimented me in a mysterious tone, so that I began to blush and quite lost countenance when I perceived the ladies whispering, laughing and holding confabulations in low tones. Young people do not know how to keep a secret; they know not how to guide either their words or actions to this end. Their attempts at discretion, the air of indifference they strive to assume, everything betrays them, hands them over to the tender mercies of the observers, and there is no one in the world with a more infallible power of observation than a coquette or a man of forty. True it is that for one reason or another everyone guessed that I had just quitted the heroine of my thoughts. And they looked upon a quite young man, simple and easy to torment, as a slice of fortune. . . . No one spared to make me the butt of endless epigrams, each one duller than the last, to my thinking, but received with an acclaim to which I became a veritable martyr. They began by asking me news of Madame de Lavernay. Was not Madame de Lavernay thinking of going into the

country? Someone had met Madame de Lavernay the day before in the court of the Louvre; Madame de Lavernay here, Madame de Lavernay there; the tongues were all wagging, and there was no end to the talk on this subject. At first, I endured these indirect attacks in silence, for this formidable fire of covert jests and transparent allusions was really aimed at me; but soon, spurred to take my part, I resolved to reply. Alas! what malevolent demon inspired me with this wretched notion? To speak when you are in love is like wanting to argue when you are mad. I answered stinging phrases by mere platitudes, malicious digs by rebukes which showed some heat. And my clumsiness went so far that I sang the praises of Madame de Lavernay. That finished my chances. To take satire seriously and meet it by ponderously-formed considerations gravely argued out, is to foredoom oneself to defeat. I say so now, but did not think so then. I am bound to say that I was literally buried beneath the ruins of my eulogy. The more my prize was attacked, the more I defended her; but at every step of the discussion I lost one of my advantages and sank deeper and deeper in the abyss of a controversy in which—such was my innocence!—I was surprised to find that no one supported or encouraged me.

My failure was, in fact, that of all beginners. What lad fresh from school is there who does not see in the object of his first passion the inimitable

model of every perfection and even of every virtue? And I must add that I was not yet master of the style of conversation of the salons—a purely conventional style, the terms of which must by no means be taken literally. Harmless rallying, pats that hardly let the talons be felt, remarks, uncharitable perhaps, but only wounding skin deep—such were the weapons that the hostile camp used against Madame de Lavernay. I was in the wrong in exaggerating the dimensions of this petty warfare, of overrating the nature of the attack for the glory of repelling it; in fact, I made a great deal of display and noise for nothing or next to nothing. I have recognised as much since then, but that day I was impracticable, and the least word bringing Madame de Lavernay in question seemed to me a personal insult for which I was in duty bound to demand satisfaction.

Fortunately my adversaries were for the most part of a sex which excluded this kind of reparation. No blood was spilled, and I came off with nothing worse than a few injuries to my self-esteem, and I could easily have won consolation for these had I been less smitten. Thus—by way of example—one of the prettiest women in M. de D——’s set found means to let me know without a word that could offend modesty and without the least apparent malice, that poor Madame de Lavernay was twenty years older than I, and that upon the list of sovereigns who had reigned over her I came at such a respect-

able number that I could not possibly doubt the sensitiveness of her heart! What could I reply? The charming lips which vented this venom would have subdued my anger by a smile. I took refuge in a neighbouring apartment where play was commencing, and M. de D——, who had been present at the conversation and had doubtless taken pity on me, started some other subject in the middle of this burning theme, about which fresh storms naturally arose. In default of real satisfaction this diversion at least gave me time to recover myself and get my breath again.

A man followed me into the room in which I had sought refuge.

This was François de Larochevoucauld, one of the most brilliant minds in a century fertile in men of genius; the man of whom Madame de Maintenon said openly at Court that he had a dual being in which were represented the essence of the angels and the nature of the demons; who knew all that his preceptors had forgotten to teach him, and who, though he had but little learning, had wit enough in himself to teach everybody something. I had seated myself to recover breath more conveniently. M. de Larochevoucauld stood in front of me and said with a smile:

“You are greatly excited, my dear Roquelaure, and yet I wager you would be hard put to it to explain the causes of your excitement reasonably.”

"Don't you know the cause?" I replied warmly. "You were there. And don't you think, as I do, that these people are terribly malicious?"

"My friend, you call people malicious because you are still a stranger to their customs, you don't wear their livery, their yoke, and their chains; all that will come sooner than you imagine. I am not much older than you, but I am much more of a stoic already and should play my part more philosophically."

"Then you did not hear how they spoke of poor Madame de Lavernay?"

"They spoke of her . . . as you yourself will speak of her before six months are out."

"Six months!"

"Perhaps I have made the time rather long."

"Suppose I bet the contrary?"

"I don't like to rob anyone of his money; I would not bet."

"So you agree with those who assert . . ."

"That she is forty? Yes. And a flirt? Yes. And that she has recommenced her apprenticeship to love I don't know how many times? Yes. Only I add that you will soon share everybody's opinion; and then you will be the first to laugh . . . and joke about what hurts you so much now."

"Never!"

"You will see."

"But I love her."

"You think so."

"I worship her."

"That's much more likely."

"And you speak in vain," I added, placing—if I recollect aright—my hand on my heart. "Let people do what they will; in spite of every slander, I mean to love her and I shall love her always."

"Ah!" he replied with a sigh, "that would be really fine; it would be worthy of the ancient days. . . . But unfortunately you have ceased to love her already."

"I don't love *her*—Madame de Lavernay?"

"You never loved her."

"Then how can you explain?"

"Do you want me to tell you candidly?"

"I insist on it."

"Well, you have done as every young gentleman with a sound heart does—what I did in my time, and what our children will do in their time, if we have any. There's an apprenticeship to everything, my dear Baron, and the apprenticeship is almost always hard. Willy-nilly, one has to go through it; and there is your position. One's beginnings are tests, and you are actually engaged in winning your spurs. But does it follow that you are a prey to unhappiness? On the contrary. You are surrounded by illusion, blinded by brilliancy, and carried off your feet by the glory of the thing. You happened to meet Madame de Lavernay. It

is what we call a chance passion; she is your first treasure, you scarcely know yet how to distinguish true money from false, and everything combines to make you imagine yourself happy. Yours is a lucky time of life; it has a delightful blindness which hides wrinkles, conceals imperfections, and even veils the defects of the first woman of your heart. Make good use of your illusions, but be quite sure that you are only commencing. And so, my dear Roquelaure, console yourself for the witticisms of which you were the butt just now. You would not have been attacked so smartly if people believed that your wound is a deep one; in that case, believe me, they would have been more magnanimous."

"Perhaps there is some truth in what you say," I replied, after reflecting for a moment. "However, I would have sworn, judging by certain symptoms . . . for, if I am to confess the truth, I hardly sleep, I drink very little, and have lost all appetite. It seems to me that all this points to . . ."

"A state of mind that is not so difficult to explain as you suppose; and I'll explain it, if you like, in a few words."

"Let us see, then."

"Well, you may be sure, my dear Roquelaure, that in spite of your efforts to identify Madame de Lavernay with the sentiment which dominates

you, that lady has nothing whatever to do with it. You are not in love with the woman, but with love itself."

The phrase appealed to me—it hit the mark. I pretended to aim two or three more lunges at my opponent and to break my last lance for Madame de Lavernay. But in fact that little piece of reasoning had damaged her cause immensely. Yet I must avow that for six months after the soirée at M. de D——'s, I still wore the badge of my lady and mistress. I did perhaps discern through the somewhat rarefied mist of my passion, certain of those imperfections that had been so malevolently betrayed by her detractors. The well-established wrinkles, the patronising self-assurance and lackadaisical manners that indicate the "forties" were crushing evidence too plain to be ignored; but I kept my eyes shut, or, to be more precise, I used to look at Madame de Lavernay without seeing her as she was.

I have already said that our intimacy continued six months longer. I should add that I have always kept a merry, if not a tender memory of Madame de Lavernay.

It is only grown children of twenty who can long cherish and preserve illusions of that kind.

CHAPTER II

A glance backwards—King Luynes—An epigram—A good deed done by the devil—The Bishop of Luçon—Sketch—The Cardinal's taste for gallantry—Mademoiselle de Pont-Courlay—Rivalries—War commenced—Small causes and great effects—The stupid look of the Marquis de Combalet—The Duc d'Epéron's saying—Madame de S.—A secret revealed—The knee of Marie de Médicis—A trap—The Cardinal in good luck—Unexpected result—The birth of the Dauphin—Is he his father's son?—Absurd tattle—His Eminence's feverish fits—M. de Cinq-Mars—My first campaign—The Comte de Soissons, Madame de Combalet and the poet Neuf-Germain.

MORE than ten years had elapsed since M. de Luynes had died at Longueville of a malignant fever contracted at the siege of Monheur. My father was still living at that time, and as a child I had often heard him deplore the absence of the Queen-mother, not because he had great confidence in her political ability, but because he detested the supremacy of favourites. Upon this account the power of Luynes, who was called the *King*, was calculated to evoke his mistrust and disapproval. I was then too young properly to appreciate my father's reasons; but I have since very carefully examined them and I fully understand their weight. Such a minister was well

worthy to succeed the intriguer Concini, and it is enough to make a man doubt his senses to hear it seriously related that he owed his favour, first to the patronage of the Maréchal d'Ancre, and later to the exceptional talent with which he taught magpies to hunt sparrows, an ingenious pastime which procured him the young king's appreciation and affection. Here indeed was an instance of admirable prevision, when the heads of a state disorganised in its administration and finances selected a bird-catcher—a bird-catcher, mark you—to restore its prosperity and reform its system. The fruit was such as the tree promised. Such a method could only yield unsatisfactory results. So the ministry of King Luynes was ten times more disastrous and burdensome to France than the ministry of the crafty Concini. Add the fact that he had two brothers, to whom he condescendingly committed a share of his sovereignty, whence it resulted that our fathers in the preceding generation had three tyrants instead of one. Among the Maréchal de Roquelaure's papers I found an epigram which was everywhere known in Paris a short time before the death of this prime minister. It was not only printed and covertly sold, they say, but a large number of handwritten copies were almost openly circulated in the salon. Here are the lines; the verses are worse than middling, I must allow, but they reproduce the situation faithfully enough:

The too simple King gives all away,
And Luynes will all in ruins lay ;
His brothers both make all their prey,
And all their kin are in the play.
The Chancellor explains away
What's wasted by their agents gay ;
Officials do our pockets flay,
The Great Seal's busy every day
To legalise their pretty play.
Rochefoucauld argues that they may,
While Arnoux hides the facts away.
The Queen in grumbling spends the day ;
The Prince is making love alway ;
The Parliament won't say them nay,
And we poor French for all must pay.
They've brought the nation to decay,
And if God doesn't say his say
The devil will carry all away.

The devil, to do him justice, began by carrying away M. de Luynes, and no one thought of grieving about it. Unfortunately the devil never does a good action without taking his revenge at once, and he let loose the Bishop of Luçon upon us, a man who was little better, and whose cardinal's hat and skull-cap, secured at the point, as it were, of the militant entreaties of the Queen-mother, have left such melancholy memories among the nobility. The Court may be called a firmament which never lacks splendid meteors and brilliant stars. Scarcely had the star of Luynes set when that of the lucky bishop began to shine on the horizon. It shone with a splendid and a dazzling light. The Bishop of Luçon had not the modest virtues proper to his calling. He

was no churchman, either by the peaceable character which the Gospel enjoins, or by tolerance, or by disinterestedness. His lordship neither knew—may Heaven pardon him!—how to forgive wrongs, nor how to follow counsels of moderation or conciliation. He wanted to gain every point at the charge, and gave no thought to what he upset in his progress. He was an incarnation of bigotry and irascibility, despising gentle methods and loving to fulminate in freedom. His system of government can be explained by two words which rule the world: will and obstinacy. And the truth is that Cardinal Richelieu's administration, considered as a whole, exemplifies brute force used irresistibly and impetuously. It would not befit me to offer a serious opinion upon a period which, so to say, is withdrawn from my censures, since I was scarcely capable of understanding the movement of state affairs, their causes and results, at that time.

I could but speak by hearsay of the great events which marked the course of that astonishing administration, in which must be included the alternating quarrels and coalitions with Marie de Médicis, the taking of La Rochelle, the annihilation of the Protestant party, the more complete subjection of the nobles to the King's authority, the famous Dupes' Day, the bitter persecution of duellists, the execution of Montmorency at Toulouse, the trial of the unhappy Urbain Grandier, a proceeding at once

ridiculous and monstrous, frightful and farcical, and so many other deeds stamped, as it were, with the mark of an inexorable policy incessantly directed to the same end; the humiliation of the French nobility and the concentration of all power in the King's hands, regardless of the fact that those great symbols of public authority ought to subsist the one by means of the other, each affording support to each.

My intention, I repeat, is to pass lightly over all that concerns Cardinal Richelieu. What has not been said a hundred times about this versatile, ambitious, subtle, persistent man of genius, who showed anger when anger could not compromise him and caution when prudence commanded it, who had equal pretensions to fine feeling and statecraft? What remains in my mind from it all is the idea that this priest was one of the most interesting men to observe of all that have appeared on the political stage for a long time, joined to the regret that I was not of an age to be on intimate terms with him. But if my relations with him were slight, that was not the case with Mademoiselle de Pont-Courlay, his niece, who afterwards became the Marquise de Combalet, and whom I often met at the house of one of my father's friends, Madame de S——, who had formerly been lady of the bed-chamber to the Queen at the Court of Henri IV. Madame de Combalet was the prettiest, freshest,

most taking, and most infernal little coquette that one can imagine; and I own that, though I never followed in the tracks of the prime minister, I felt for her—not love, indeed—but so tender and so enthusiastic an admiration that it wanted little to deserve the name of love.

The time had long passed, at the period of which I am speaking, when Marie de Médicis, after the civil war fomented by her in Normandy, consented to return to the Court upon the solicitations of Du Perron, Bishop of Sens, and of President Jannin, and imposed on the King, as proof of his reconciliation to her, the obligation of asking the Pope for a cardinal's hat for her well-beloved prelate. The time was past when she had obtained that ardently desired red cap, in spite of the covert opposition of Louis XIII., and had forcibly wrung from her son, one day when he returned from hunting, the post of Secretary of State for her protégé. All these proofs of affection had had a result calculated to make the Queen-mother reflect seriously upon the inconstancy of men and especially upon the ingratitude of favourites. The Cardinal's relentless hostility to Marie de Médicis has been explained in various ways. It has been said that the statesman was impatient of every influence which might counterbalance his own, and that the yoke of his former patroness became intolerable to him; and this theory does not lack

probability, since it is notorious that debts of gratitude are those which we find most burdensome and that the greatest services rendered us are sometimes just those we are least disposed to pardon. It has also been contended that that fatal split took its origin in the war that broke out in Italy about the inheritance of the Mantua dukedom in 1627, I think. The lawful successor was the Duc de Nevers, a scion of the Gonzaga family. Europe almost unanimously declared against his rights. Richelieu alone was of opinion that they should be upheld, in spite of the vigorous opposition of the two queens. Louis XIII., who was a man of spirit and desired war, gave the day to his minister as against his mother and his wife, and led the expedition in person with the most brilliant results. The duke was confirmed in his sovereignty. This, according to some persons, was the first cause of the Queen-mother's ill-will. But if I may believe the tell-tale chronicles of those circles which were then in a position to judge best, the rumour which attributed the estrangement of the Queen-mother and the Cardinal to the latter's liking for his niece was not altogether unfounded. However that may be, and no matter what was the motive for this warfare between two so powerful personages in the state, it is at least certain that the Queen-mother was jealous of Madame de Combalet and not without reason.

The Marquise de Combalet was a perfect little

demon. Beautiful as an angel, more of a coquette than all the other ladies of the Court put together, with the brilliancy that attaches to a new star, she would have turned the heads of the whole College of Cardinals. She was satisfied with one, who was well worth a dozen of the others. Certainly she had no grounds for complaining of Richelieu, for she owed him all she had . . . even to her husband, whom she received from the hands of his Eminence, and who was absolutely the most apish ugly fellow that Satan ever dressed up in the semblance of a human face to incite a woman to transgress! I never think of that horrible Marquis de Combalet without recalling a smart saying of the Duc d'Epéron on about him.

"What a fool that man must be, to judge by his face!" I exclaimed one day, pointing to Combalet, who was making circles by spitting into a basin.

"Do not go by that," replied D'Epéron. "His face is very deceptive. He is much more foolish than he looks."

It was at the house of Madame de S—— that I one night heard in minute detail the history of the rupture between the Cardinal and the Queen-mother. Poor Madame de S——, who still believed in the old traditions of the French monarchy, and supposed that nothing in the world could resist a queen's anger, exclaimed, "The unhappy Marquise

de Combalet is ruined. Will she be allowed so much as to choose her place of exile? And what will her husband do?"

This remark of Madame de S—— appeared to me, I must avow, very singular, not to say absurd, and I replied:

"Your sensibility, my dear lady, carries you too far, and in sympathising with the Marquis you would make us think that you do not know what is known everywhere, that Combalet is only his wife's husband when he sees it is his interest to be so or cannot help himself. You may feel quite sure that in this instance he will keep free from any ill consequences, and that if anything unpleasant happens to the Marquise he will not have the distinction of sharing in it."

Madame de S—— seemed to reflect for a moment upon what she had said, then she suddenly added:

"So I actually made mention of that idiot Combalet?"

"Now that's a saying," I replied, "that excuses us both, you from explaining yourself further and me from chaffing you any more. Let us return to the Marquise. You are quite perturbed; what is the matter?"

The company, which included MM. de Baugé, d'Artigues and Madame de Guéménée, who afterwards herself thwarted the amour of Richelieu with the Queen Anne of Austria, gathered around Madame

de S—— as if to support my question, and the worthy lady whose long experience at the Court of the late king rendered her an expert in matters of gallantry, confided to us the following account :

“Yesterday,” said she, “no later than yesterday, an act in two scenes was played at the Luxembourg and at Ruel which at the first glance seems the most trifling in the world, but I should not be astonished to see the state thrown into disorder as the result of it. You know,” resumed Madame de S——, after pausing for a moment to take breath, “that I am a close friend of the little Combalet, and that I am equally able to command the Du Fargis, who hates her with her whole heart. My opinion is that one should have friends everywhere, and that it is never a bad thing to keep up relations with both the opposing camps. So it is to the Du Fargis that I am indebted for the details I am going to give you. Marie de Médicis had passed the whole day at the Luxembourg, and it was easy to guess from the absolute perfection of her toilette that something was expected . . . or somebody. Madame du Fargis knew very well what was stirring, but said no word about it. The Queen was continually sighing, moving restlessly in her chair, looking at the clocks, or moving her right knee in that nervous tremor which indicates the highest degree of impatience and vexation with her. Madame du Fargis moved from

one room to another, as if she were busy, to avoid making her feel uncomfortable. But she might have spared herself the trouble, for whenever she returned the Queen was as ill at ease as ever, and the knee kept moving. Du Fargis perceived that Marie de Médicis did not wish to begin a conversation, but would be pleased with anyone who began one for her. So she made no scruple to break in upon her Majesty's silence by asking her the cause of her annoyance. The Queen protested, as you may imagine. She was not annoyed, she said, but she could not understand how unpunctuality could be carried to a point that verged upon lack of respect and courtesy. 'If your Majesty is awaiting his Eminence the Cardinal,' replied the Du Fargis, 'I fear your patience will be put to a hard test, for I know that his Eminence, after signing several dispatches for abroad this morning, was to go to the Louvre to proceed thence to Ruel, where his charming niece, Madame de Combalet, has been residing for a week or two. That is a great deal to do, as you see, and I do not think he will soon have finished.' The Queen, they say, turned very pale when she heard that revelation of perfidy; she immediately ordered Du Fargis to take pen and paper, and dictated the following letter to her:

“Do not come to Ruel. I have just received a letter from the Queen-mother requesting me to attend at once at the Luxembourg Palace. So I

shall be there for the rest of the day and for the night, till to-morrow; but as I must speak to you about most important things, find out what room I am lodged in after your visit to the Queen this evening, and come to see me as secretly as possible. I shall be awaiting you.' She added a postscript: 'Do not be surprised if you do not recognise my handwriting. I have hurt my finger very badly. But fear nothing, the person I employ is worthy of all confidence.'

"Then having summoned one of the grooms on duty, she bade him carry the letter with all speed to the Louvre, find out if the Cardinal was still there, and if he were, have the letter handed to him, if not, to be sure to bring it back. No sooner said than done. In less than ten minutes the prelate received the letter, and could not suppress a pitiful sigh over the hurt hand of the poor Marquise, whose fingers had all been so supple, fine and white the day before. No doubt his only solace was in thinking that he would try to heal it with two or three zealous kisses. At night the Cardinal arrived and wished to be shown into the presence of the Queen-mother. The Du Fargis was at her post; she stopped him by saying that her Majesty was unwell and had retired to bed early. The Cardinal was all condolence, and declared that he felt the keenest regret he could not be received. That was mere deceit, and the sharp Du Fargis did

not fall a victim to Monseigneur de Richelieu's pretences. She accompanied him towards the staircase as he returned, as if the action were purposeless; but all of a sudden she seemed to recollect something, and asked him if he would not like just to say good-night to his niece. She said it in a tone of innocence that would have entrapped the most wary. The Cardinal on his side affected indifference. He consented, but rather with the air of a man who resigns himself to a duty than that of a lover delighted to go to his mistress. The Du Fargis showed him the way, and left him as soon as she had done so, wishing him every happiness. The Cardinal did not perceive that in this wish, uttered in an agreeable voice, there was something fiendish and terrible. Possessed by one idea, his mind perturbed by the immediate prospects of his bliss, he entered the corridor she had indicated with the light and triumphant steps of the seducer. . . . Buckingham of amorous memory was not more elegant, better equipped, or more sure of himself. He had the clearest directions to the door. He tapped softly, and it must be owned the door troubled him with no opposition, which was an excellent omen for all beyond. And now just imagine," continued Madame de S——, who could not refrain from smiling in spite of her emotion, "just imagine our lucky Cardinal on the threshold to which all his wishes had turned, with his imagination already

busy upon the wildest plans and the maddest dreams. He enters the sanctuary, he is about to see his adorable niece, he advances; unhappily, the adorable niece is terribly clumsy. A light was in her hand, she catches her arm against the corner of a piece of furniture, down goes the lamp, and is extinguished. Then the black sprite of darkness suggests a malicious inspiration to his Eminence. He feels his way in the darkness, and seizing the goddess of the place by the arm, declares that he will not allow her to light the lamp again till he has uttered a few words. Joy has deprived him of his wits. His protestations are feverish and extravagant, for he sees in the notion of this *tête-à-tête* that has occurred so opportunely to his niece an unmistakable and delicious proof of love. 'Softly,' says the pretended Madame de Combalet without disguising her voice, 'a little moderation, your Eminence, and let us both try to see what we are doing a little more clearly.' At the same time she opens the door of a small room where a second lamp is burning, and Richelieu finds himself confronted by Marie de Médicis."

"Worthy of mythology!" cried M. de Baugé. "Medusa's head could hardly have produced a more dire emotion."

"For him it was the phantom of remorse," added D'Artigues, laughing.

"Oh," resumed Madame de S——, "the Cardinal

is not a man to be frightened at a trifle, and, let him say what he will, he has not enough belief in hell to trouble himself about supernatural apparitions. So he was very much vexed, but very little overcome. And then this is what happened: The Queen tried to carry it with loud words, but she had not the best of it at that."

"Just so," M. d'Artigues remarked, interrupting, "the Eminence shouted louder than the Majesty."

"So loud," continued Madame de S——, "that the indistinct noise of their voices was heard in the suite of rooms below."

"Richelieu is no better than a dead man," cried M. de Baugé, crossing his hands.

"I fear it is so," murmured Madame de S——.

"And I," resumed D'Artigues, "assure you that the Cardinal is more alive than ever, and that the person ruined is the Queen-mother."

"What do you mean?" cried Madame de S—— and M. de Baugé simultaneously.

"M. d'Artigues is right," said a lady who till then had listened to the conversation without joining in it, "the Queen is ruined."

The words were uttered with conviction. All eyes sought the speaker who had confirmed the prophecy of M. d'Artigues about Marie de Médicis.

It was the Princesse de Guéménée.

Facts soon justified the melancholy prediction. Richelieu, far from losing countenance, raised his

head in pride, and at the moment when the poor Queen thought she was overwhelming her favourite, her favourite's anger was a menace to herself. How matters have gone since is common knowledge. The struggle was long, desperate and relentless. The former Bishop of Luçon suffered in his nerves every time he saw the woman to whom he owed his rise. When we turn to hate one who has benefited us, we hate him far more bitterly than an ordinary enemy. The persecution carried out by the Cardinal stands as a masterpiece of elaboration and refinement. And he achieved his ends. He estranged mother and son, and procured a final sentence of exile against the Queen. On the other hand, Madame de Combalet was fêted, spoiled and worshipped. And later Richelieu went so far as to repay her favours with the title of Duchesse d'Aguillon. Tongues would have been busy about this edifying theme if another event, of much superior importance, had not in the same year pre-occupied the worthy people of Paris. The royal consorts had, after so many years of unfruitfulness, just "done a little work," to employ a phrase from a pamphlet that lies before me. Anne of Austria was *enceinte*.

I have never been and never shall be accused of prudishness. I think I am above all suspicion on that point; so I shall say quite frankly what I have always thought concerning the long-deferred

motherhood of the young Queen. In the first place, as a general rule, people are rarely willing to attribute a perfectly ordinary origin to a king, one, if I may so put it, free from all admixture. That privilege is one which the vulgar hesitate to accord when august personages are in question, and when the interests of a nation and of a dynasty are influenced by the birth of the infant. This unfortunate custom was not abandoned in favour of King Louis XIII. Pamphlets and public rumours were for a long time kept going upon this abundant material for insatiable avidity. Buckingham was suspected and even Richelieu was accused; if these two personages had not been ready to hand, anyone else in the world might have been thought capable of helping the Queen to a child except the King. The middle-class is merciless when it betakes itself to slander, especially when the nobility by their silence or by the indirect allusions of some among them give authority to this silliness by their pernicious example. But let people say what they will, I am of opinion that there was no truth in this ante-chamber tattling. Buckingham was very handsome, very conceited and very full of assurance, and, setting the question of virtue aside, those were not qualities which would have been to the Queen's taste. As for the Cardinal, it cannot be denied that he had the strongest longing in her direction, but nothing has ever established that she gave him

the least hope. So I conclude that the Dauphin was as legitimate as anybody can be, and the profound respect which I have always felt in his presence was a secret intimation to me that I was not wrong.

I recall that the most pleasurable hopes were founded on the birth of this illustrious scion, who, however, had committed the fault of coming too late and whose tardy arrival entailed on France a stormy passage through the disturbed period of his minority. These hopes were but scantily fulfilled at first. The Queen-mother, who had sought refuge in London with her daughter Henrietta, wife of the unhappy Charles I., heard no echo of the rejoicings at the baptism of the heir-apparent. The hostility of Richelieu prevented her from crossing the few miles of sea which parted her from the fatherland of her grandson. And, worse still, the illustrious exile was soon deprived of the hospitality of England. The storm of popular indignation was already loud in the ancient land of the Tudors and the Plantagenets. She withdrew to the city of Cologne, which became her last refuge and her grave.

No one was more inclined than I to take life in its frivolous, careless and diverting aspect. Now, after this perfectly genuine avowal, consider what a singular effect the last years of Richelieu's supremacy were likely to produce in me. The sometime Bishop of Luçon had grown old before the time, and when

the son of Louis XIII. came into the world, his habits and manner of procedure underwent such a change that the Court very shortly became untenable ground for anyone who was not a favourite or, to speak more accurately, a creature of the Cardinal. I admit that I had felt a real sympathy for his Eminence upon the occasion of the founding of the French Academy. That idea completely won me, and young as I was, I followed with close interest the labours—admittedly not brilliant—of the first members of that learned assembly. The witticisms of Bautru, the heroic novels of François-le-Metel de Bois-Robert, a sort of clown to his Eminence, and the interesting discourses of the modest Conrard, seemed to me elements, still confused no doubt, but real elements of an approaching renaissance in the world of letters. After the interminable religious controversies, I was rejoiced to see the Cardinal disposed to exchange the laurels won at La Rochelle for the green wreath of Apollo. The course of events showed me my mistake. Richelieu was indeed anxious to acquire repute as a man of fine sayings, a pleasant writer, and even as a poet; in fact, on this point he had pretensions which made him resemble those small provincial squires who wish to be tacked on to the nobility at any cost and throw their scrap of qualification at everybody's head in and out of season. But whatever may have been his weakness for poetry and his jealousy of

poets, these little passions were far from satisfying the insatiable appetite of his immense genius. He always returned to his wily policy and to the care of his realm, since it is beyond question that *he* was king. His qualities, started upon this course, followed the common law. His cunning had for long been that of the fox, but gradually approximated to the sanguinary instincts of the wild cat. Satiated with power, he tried to renew the keenness of his feelings by cruelty. An acute disease, which tormented him in the last period of his life, gave a stimulus to this evil inclination. His impatience and rage recurred with the paroxysms of it; and among the inmates of the castle these were called the "feverish fits of his Eminence." His obstinacy especially passed belief. It was in the midst of this lamentable disorder that he had Château-Neuf, the Keeper of the Seals, banished from the Council, signed the charge which cost Saint-Preuil, governor of the town of Arras, his head, and resolved upon the ruin of the Master of the Horse, M. de Cinq-Mars. This last proceeding remains a grievous stigma on the name and memory of Richelieu; for, try as one will, it is not possible to make out that M. de Cinq-Mars was a treacherous plotter or a base criminal. I often saw him at Saint-Germain, and I think I may assert, for I am a good judge of faces, that his countenance was that of an honest man. He had an open, sprightly expression, a noble

cast of features, very white hands; in a word, the whole appearance that befits a man of gentle birth. He was extremely devoted to his Majesty, who, though he treated him brusquely sometimes, made much use of his zeal; and, further, he obeyed the Cardinal in all matters, in spite of the many unpleasantnesses to which the latter's uncertain moods subjected him. His one fault was, I must admit, that he had a taste for doing nothing, and was fond of secretly quitting the King's apartments at night to betake himself in hot haste to the Marais, to the house of the beautiful Marion de Lorme, where he often passed a portion of the night. But do we treat idleness and gallantry as unpardonable sins? For my part I believe that he would but have committed very trifling peccadilloes if he had not been urged on to his ruin by the intolerable tyranny of the old minister. What most damaged him in the eyes of the latter was the especial favour with which the King distinguished him. The Cardinal wanted only lackeys about him, and from the moment when Cinq-Mars departed from that rôle, Richelieu regarded him as a rival.

While these events were proceeding I had my first experience of war, and first entertained the brilliant hope of adding a fresh lustre to the name of Roquelaure, already so honoured on the field of battle. If my first efforts were not lucky, Fortune alone is to blame for that, and I have the consola-

tion of reflecting that no one in the world would dare to attribute my ill success to failure to do my duty or a want of courage.

The Vicomte de Turenne, whose devotion to the King was never in question, was brother to the Duc de Bouillon, who was one of the Cardinal's bitterest enemies. The Duke associated himself with the Comte de Soissons and the Archbishop of Reims, afterwards Duc de Guise, to overthrow the Cardinal's power. Everyone knows that. But the extraordinary circumstances which aroused the vehement hatred of the Comte de Soissons is not universally known. Is it conceivable that after the tales told about Madame de Combalet—tales which were generally regarded at the Court as true and authentic accounts—the Cardinal had the impudence to offer this young lady's hand to the Count shortly after she was left a widow by the death of the insignificant husband we spoke of before? This proposal, one must admit, had all the appearance of a joke, and seemed a glaring piece of imposition. Either the Cardinal wanted to make a dupe of the Comte de Soissons, or else his former love for his niece blinded him in the strangest way to the prospects of such a match. The Count, already strongly disposed to dislike the Cardinal, took the thing in very ill part, and showed by the haughty disdain of his answer that he was wounded to the quick by the impertinence of the offer. So it was the death

of that imbecile Combalet which was the immediate cause of the notable quarrel. Neuf-Germain, a little poetaster who often sought to be witty and almost always failed, made a very neat observation upon this circumstance. I repeat his remark without defending it, just as I heard it.

“All this would not have happened,” exclaimed Neuf-Germain when he heard that the Comte de Soissons had withdrawn to Sedan, “if the widowhood of the Marquise had been deferred a few years. That wretch Combalet, whose life did no good to anybody, might at least have had sense enough to die at the right time.”

CHAPTER III

The battle of La Marfée—Impressions of my first fight—My answer to the Maréchal de Fabert—The death of the Comte de Soissons—Various accounts—A disaster—I am wounded—An enforced stay at Donchery—The weariness of solitude—The mysterious carriage—I rescue a young and beautiful girl from an unknown danger—A sentimental journey to Reims—The road—Fanfette yawns—The inn-keeper and Dr. Mathielmus—Fanfette's stays—A doctor's visit—Singular questions—The ungratifying fee which I paid for the visit of the venerable Mathielmus—A quick way downstairs—Farewell to Fanfette—A stolen kiss—Daydreams.

THE encounter between the King's forces and the troops of the feudal party took place at La Marfée, a small village situated between Sedan and Donchery. I never utter this name of La Marfée, the scene of my first feats in arms, without quivering from head to foot. What a splendid day is the day of battle! The sky greets you with a smile, the buoyant air seems to penetrate your pores, your heart is big with the ardour of it. The neighing of the horses, the whirling dust-clouds, the scent of the powder, the noise of cannonade and fusillade—these are things to be mad about, to make you forget all the mistresses in the world. I remember that the

first time I saw the magic picture of a *mêlée* in French style spread out around me and was one of the living figures in it, my head swam and I was stupefied with joy. I shall always recollect how when the fight was at its thickest and victory had not yet declared itself for either side, I had been swept, I know not how, on to a small hill whence I could discern the whole field of operations. I was covered with sweat and dust, and somewhat weary perhaps. Be that as it may, I rose in my stirrups, without attending much to what I was doing, and gazed in a sort of ecstasy at this sight, which was so fresh to me. Doubtless the feelings that then stirred my soul to its depths were revealed upon my face, and the emotion which possessed me showed itself plainly, for at the end of two or three minutes, during which I had remained motionless upon the same spot, I heard a voice which was familiar to me speaking loud behind me. I turned about. The speaker was M. de Fabert. He gazed into my eyes with a curious scrutiny, and exclaimed:

“Are you trembling, Roquelaure?”

“Yes, General,” I answered briskly; “I’m quivering with pleasure.”

Upon that I put my horse to the gallop and plunged for the second time into the fight. It was hot work; for if on our side we had chiefs like the *Maréchal de Chatillon*, M. de Fabert and the *Marquis de Praslin*, the rebels were led by the

Duc de Bouillon and Louis de Bourbon, Comte de Soissons, grandson of the Prince de Condé who was killed at Jarnac. So I had my initiation in a notable affair. Devoted as I was to the King's interests, I cannot but render justice to the valour displayed by our foes, whose vigour was no doubt animated by the relentless hatred which they cherished for the Cardinal. However that might be, and in spite of prodigies of valour performed in our ranks, we had the worst of it, and my military baptism was a defeat. The Princes' force gained the day, and by a strange coincidence one of their most important leaders fell at the moment of their triumph. The Comte de Soissons was killed by a pistol-shot just when the victory was finally decided. Many accounts of his death have been circulated. Some have said that a trooper of one of the King's regiments was seen to fire point blank at him; others have declared that he killed himself by inadvertence while trying to raise his helmet with his pistol. As for me, I have always persisted in believing, as did Sourdis and Praslin, that one of his own soldiers took advantage of an opportunity to gratify a personal grudge.

It would be difficult to express how my budding pride was wounded when I heard the words "retreat," "rout," almost the word "flight" murmured around me. To flee before the enemy! A blush of shame rose to my brow, and rage filled my heart. Furious,

reckless, without calculating the consequences of my rashness, I rallied my men, I noted a point in the enemy's formation which I could pierce by a swift and glorious charge, and away we went at a breakneck gallop. To say what happened then is beyond my power; all I know is that there was a tremendous shock, that the game was lively and thorough, and that the trusty fellows who had followed me in that hazardous excursion brought me back to the neighbouring village with an ugly enough wound. I had seen matters well through that time at least, and had nothing to complain of. I had been carried off unconscious, and a worthy villager of Donchery accorded me a hospitality in his cottage which I did not forget afterwards, and for which he has many times since had reason to congratulate himself.

I was too weak to endure the fatigue of the road, so it was decided to leave me at Donchery; and I raised no difficulty in making a stay there, for I was not without hope that I might turn the time to account. To make what follows clearly understood, I must mention, to my confusion and to the honour of M. de Larochefoucauld, that the face of Madame de Lavernay had completely vanished from my memory, and that within the time named by him I had begun a series of infidelities, to the prejudice of that lady, the real number of which I should find it very difficult to give. But

I ought to say that, though I had poached here and there, I had not entered into any serious bonds, and my heart had emerged from these skirmishes without losing any of its liberty. But what is liberty at twenty-four? I grew as tired of it as a slave could grow of his chains, and I was in the same situation as those wearied idlers who do not know how to kill time, and who would gladly exchange the sham happiness of their monotonous existence for the stormy delights of a life full of action, anxiety and peril. War was a good half of the paradise I had dreamed of; but it was never more than a half, and I never had much taste for incomplete pleasures. Besides, the stir of the battle, the scent of the powder, even the feverishness caused by my hurt, had added a sort of self-confidence to my natural eagerness, which prompted me to conceive the boldest plans and set about the execution of them. When a man is young, all the ardours of his nature help one another, the most opposed passions give one another mutual support. After fighting well, one feels disposed to make love well. And perhaps the check I had experienced on the field of battle secretly prompted me to take my revenge on ground where, if less glory awaited me, less danger awaited me also. So, as anyone will see, I was admirably disposed to try my chances in a love-adventure, and the deity who presides over that sort of campaign deigned to gratify my wish

and treat me exactly as I desired. About a week had passed after the sad business at La Marfée, and I was walking about seven in the evening in a little wood, the boundary of which was a quarter of a league distant from Donchery ; I saw a carriage without armorial bearings coming towards me by one of the cross-ways, enveloped in a cloud of dust ; it was drawn by a couple of horses that were sturdy enough but overdone and foaming with fatigue, and mounted on one was a postillion of about thirty years of age. I know not why, but at the sight of this rapidly driven carriage I imagined that something mysterious was in the wind. The horses were breathing hard, the driver was covered with sweat, and the axles were creaking deplorably. Let who will account for my sentiment of mistrust. It is an everyday occurrence to see a coach moving at full speed, and you simply stand aside to let it pass. But I was seized with a desire to do just the contrary, to take my stand in the middle of the road as a human obstruction, at the risk of being knocked to atoms. No doubt the postillion was astonished at my rashness, and I believe, God forgive me, that when he saw me alone upon the road standing on tiptoe and brandishing my sword, he thought he had to deal with a lunatic, for he showed no fear, and simply prepared to swerve aside so as to avoid running over me. In all conscience I ought to have given

him credit for the proceeding, and I was already revising my first bad impression of him when a piercing cry came from within the carriage. It made me quiver at once with indignation and joy, for the voice, beyond all doubt, was a woman's, and assuredly the woman was young and pretty. At least I imagined so, and in this I followed the common law. I defy anyone to form a different supposition in such circumstances.

The man in charge, when he saw me come straight towards him, checked his horses' speed and asked me in a sort of German jargon if I wanted to run his horses' bellies through with my naked sword. He seemed disposed to make a joke of it, and I thought well to clear his mind on this point as soon as possible; so I told him I had no fault to find with his cattle, but should deal direct with his own belly if he attempted to advance a yard further. It seemed that, in spite of his accent, he understood French perfectly, for he pulled up short and looked at me in such profound astonishment that I could not forbear laughing. But there was something better to occupy me. A girl had just lowered one of the windows of the coach, and her eyes appealed to me with such a supplicating look as would have turned the heads of the seven sages of Greece. I called on the postillion to tell me at once, without hesitation or taking time to concoct a lie, by what right he was carrying the young lady off, whence

he came, and whither he was taking her. At the same time, and to give my questions more practical importance, I drew a pistol from my belt. In reality it was not loaded, but with a sharp movement I pressed the barrel of it to the fellow's chest, and this had the effect of making him bring out the truth without more ado.

"Take away that horrible weapon," he said to me in a pitiful voice. "The girl you see was in a convent of Ursulines at Mézières. I am taking her to Sedan, where old Baron Hohenstauff is expecting her; he gave me thirty pistoles for my trouble, without reckoning in my postillion's fee. Let me go on, Mr. Officer," he added. "My reputation as an honest driver is at stake. Just think, it is but five leagues from Mézières to Sedan . . . thirty pistoles for coming and going . . . that's good pay."

"If your scruples go according to your pay," I said to him, "this matter can be settled. The baron gave you thirty pistoles for five leagues. Now I'll give you thirty more to stop here, release this charming young woman who is crying, and get back to your home. That will halve the journey for you and double the pay."

It seems that the worthy fellow was only honest and incorruptible as far as the belt, and that as soon as cash was to be considered, his probity became less severe and his honesty more tractable.

He patted his horse's neck and murmured between his teeth.

"Well, we might see . . ."

What eloquence there was in that commonplace remark! It was the last cry of a mortally wounded conscience which is only too glad to expire. As a smart campaigner, I resolved to make the most of my advantage and strike the iron while it was hot. To set aside tall talk and metaphor, I may as well say that I drew my purse from the ample folds of my breeches, and this significant action seemed to fill the rascal with heavenly joy.

He stretched out his hand like a man well used to that kind of arrangement, and did not even seek to palliate his fall by a few of those affectations which in the eyes of some people do service as scruples. He yielded to temptation frankly. But that was not all. I bade him wait while I learned the young woman's wishes, for I might possibly have need of him. My liberality had made him as pliant as a twig. He did not stir. Then I pointed to the door of the coach, and he opened it for me at once.

The fair one, for we may give her that title without fear of contradiction, had fainted, or, to put it better, was half-dead with fear and emotion. By this I easily perceived that an abduction in set form was afoot, and that I had been introduced into one of those mad romantic adventures of which

I had been dreaming for some days. I at once formed the most seductive ideas of the consequences which, to my thinking, ought to crown so happy a commencement, and I congratulated myself on the lucky chance that had brought me to be wounded at La Marfée, for I was persuaded that this fact would add a good half to my chances of success with the interesting and unknown heroine.

I offered her my hand, she stepped from the carriage trembling and looked around as if she feared to be pursued. I tried to reassure her, and succeeded without much trouble, for there was not a sign of a living soul in the whole prospect of the road. She did not reply to my first questions. Her tongue refused its office, and she appeared like a prisoner just snatched from the four walls of his dungeon. At last she condescended to lean upon me, and said in the sweetest voice imaginable:

“Sir, I perceive by your manner that you are an honest man, and that a woman would not have cause to repent placing her trust in you. Show me this kindness—do not leave me. I need not tell you now the stratagem by means of which I was lured without the convent where I was living so quietly, nor who is the determined persecutor whose victim, but for you, I should have become. You have the right to know, and you shall know later. All that I ask of you is not to leave me alone with this wretched lackey, who is capable, I believe, of any

villainy, and who, in the hope that he might yet be rewarded by the Baron de Hohenstauff, would perhaps take me to Sedan against my will. Sir, my desire is to return to Reims. The old aunt who cared for me in my childhood lives there; she is a mother to me, nay, for me she fills the place of every relative. Restore me to her arms yourself. Let us take our places in this carriage together. A league from here we shall find horses, and in a few hours we shall have reached our destination. Will you do so, sir, or have I presumed too far upon your kindness in thinking you incapable of denying me a service on which my happiness, my honour, perhaps my life, depend?"

There was so much earnestness and genuine feeling in the fair traveller's voice that I did not think of replying in the negative to her charming challenge. To take my place beside her in that carriage and so travel to Reims was one of those magnificent wind-falls which happen but rarely in a life, and of which one would be foolish not to take advantage. I assured her I was her servant, that my time and all the care I could bestow were at her disposal, and that she could command me as she chose.

"If it is so," she resumed, "let us lose no time, and I pray you to tell the driver what he has to do."

So I took him aside, that I might not weary my fair companion with the tedious details of our compact. It was wonderful how well we understood each

other, thanks to the chinking intermediary whose influence I invoked at the right moment. And then I took my place in the carriage with the afflicted fair one, who was so good—at my request when I had just offered her my hand to assist her—as to tell me that she was called Fanfette, and I on my side disclosed my name, titles and rank. As soon as we were seated, the carriage started briskly along the road.

Imagine my sentiments! Night was falling, stars began to gleam here and there in the heavens, fragrant odours arose from the depths of the woods. I had forgotten everything, everything! Even to the worthy villager of Donchery, who had accorded me his hospitality, and to whom, as the story has shown, I had not even given notice of my departure, which strongly resembled flight. Fanfette was near me; my elbow touched hers now and again. I tried at times to respire the perfume of her sweet breath; in a word, I had only known her for an hour and I was madly in love with her! Happy is that period of life when it is equally easy to intoxicate oneself with a glance and a draught of Argenteuil wine.

My nature was not at all adapted to the restrained delights of platonism as understood by certain people, who perhaps mistake the absence of desire and the impotence of their frigid will for virtue. At our first halt, which lasted about ten minutes, I sought

to enter into conversation, and Fanfette answered me by a languorous glance which I was at first tempted to interpret as a silent provocation, but which, upon more careful observation, appeared rather to be a sign of a sudden inward weariness. I recommenced the attack, and she yawned in my face in a manner that had nothing sentimental about it and at which I could not but feel humiliated. The idea that she might be making fun of me caused me to change my method at once. I showed myself forward, daring, rash. Madame de Lavernay's lessons had not fallen upon barren soil. . . . Alone with a pretty girl in a swiftly moving vehicle and in the dark, it is natural to be madly adventurous. An odd scruple checked me. Fanfette showed no anger. . . . Well, to attempt to carry an unresisting place by assault seemed a comedy unworthy of a young gentleman who punctiliously regarded the honour of his sword and heart. I could not avoid a certain discomposure, and, almost blushing for myself, I tried to revert to my former plan, and persuade her by tender protestations.

"Fanfette," I cried in the most imploring tone I could command, "Fanfette . . . hear me."

But instead of hearing me she allowed her pretty head to fall upon her heaving breast, showed me a row of the dearest little teeth as white as ivory by yawning for the second time, and gradually fell into a complete torpor.

There could be no doubt . . . she had been drugged to sleep . . . her slumber, disturbed by uneasy dreams, was slumber due to a narcotic. Our driver's shuffling explanation confirmed my suspicion. Then pity completely replaced desire in my heart. I ceased to be the eager lover and became a faithful guardian and watchful brother, and I continued my journey towards Reims with no other thought than that of rightly fulfilling the mission with which Providence had entrusted me, and with no feeling for Fanfette but that which I should have had for a sister whose honour and tranquillity had been committed to my care.

When we had accomplished about half of our remaining journey I stopped in a town of good enough appearance, where I flattered myself I should obtain some aid for my beautiful and interesting Fanfette. I asked for a doctor; the innkeeper told me of one who lived almost opposite to him, and offered to go and look for him. But he informed me that this man was a savant of the most superior sort, who would not stir himself but for good reason and to treat persons of quality, and that I should do well to behave to him as his merits demanded. This ceremonious preface grew wearisome, and, taking the landlord by the shoulders, I bade him go and call the doctor without troubling himself about the other matter. He obeyed.

In the meanwhile I had laid Fanfette in an

easy-chair, and then I unfastened the hooks of her stomacher and unlaced the upper part of her stays.

My heart began to play the traitor with me, I began to lose my head. But I forced myself to keep calm for a moment. I tried in every way to bring her to herself and to warm her hands, which for a time seemed to me quite ice-cold. Half an hour, an hour passed, and no doctor! I rang for the innkeeper, but not before I had placed over Fanfette's breast a counterpane which I had noticed on the bed; it was large enough to cover her, but I must admit it had not occurred to me to have recourse to it while I was alone with her.

"Here I am," said the clown as he came in.

"Well, and the doctor?"

"What doctor? M. Mathielmus?"

"He or someone else . . . I do not care . . . what I want is a doctor."

"Oh, I know that. Hasn't he come?"

"You see he has not, varlet!"

"Indeed, sir, you are quite wrong in getting vexed with me about it. The famous Dr. Mathielmus won't trouble himself to come every time he's asked, and it may be he will not come at all."

I had little enough relish already for this *famous* Dr. Mathielmus, whose very name seemed to me suspicious. In fact, I had supposed at first that he was Pete or Joe or Nick, and was simply some

yokel who, under shelter of a Latin name, sought to practise medicine with impunity. This excess of conceit and these signs of exaggerated importance lowered him completely in my eyes, and I was about to send him some left-handed compliment by the innkeeper when I heard the handle of the door creak . . . the door was opened.

"Here he is," cried the landlord, and he withdrew, bowing to the ground before the illustrious member of the learned profession.

Dr. Mathielmus was a sort of tall skeleton, scraggy, lanky, tottering, so thin that he might almost have been transparent. His little staring eyes combined a rascally look with an expression of impertinence which accorded excellently with his name in *us*. He wore an untidy wig, no doubt to give the impression that he worked hard and burned the midnight oil. His nose was stuffed with snuff on one side and adorned by a yellow dribble on the other, and had a perfectly disgusting appearance. His black coat, the indispensable label of every learned ass, was so worn as to be glossy. In fact, he had the lugubrious and fusty air of a gravedigger.

He bowed and I bowed; and as he made no sign of opening his mouth, I said to him:

"Doctor, I sent for you for the young lady whom you see lying in that chair. I suspect that she has been drugged to sleep by surreptitious

means, and I hope that on your first examination of her . . .”

Mathielmus interrupted me.

“Pardon,” said he, “might I know, sir, to whom I have the honour to speak on this occasion?”

“To Gaston-Jean-Baptiste, Baron de Roquelaure, captain in the King’s service.”

“Roquelaure!” said the doctor, blinking, “it seems to me I have heard mention . . .”

“Whether or no,” I resumed, rudely enough, “be so good as to do your duty. My carriage awaits me below, and I am hurried.”

“Pardon again,” repeated the detestable pedant, “I should wish to know who this young lady is, and whose daughter she is?”

“Of what use is your science, sir, if it does not immediately instruct you that the young lady is probably the daughter of her father and certainly the daughter of her mother? Is it possible your insight does not go so far as that?”

“I put those questions to you,” continued Mathielmus, softly, “because I have an understanding with my clients and with myself which I could not disregard without becoming guilty of unpardonable levity. Sir, I only attend persons of quality. It is a rule that I never waive. Before giving my attention to this young woman it is, in consequence, necessary that I should be informed . . .”

“If she is of illustrious birth or of low ex-

traction? I do not know, exalted doctor. But if you will be good enough, in a provisional way, to feel her pulse and tell me if she is feverish, we could arrange the other matter. I pledge myself to acquire the most exact information on the point, and if I discover that I have misused your condescension I will give you any satisfaction you may be pleased to demand."

"What!" cried Mathielmus, in an outburst of astonishment; "you are travelling with this young lady, and you do not know who she is! . . . That is singular indeed."

"Yes, sir," I replied to him, raising my voice (not in anger, for the worthy man was too droll for me to get angry with him). "Yes, learned sir, I do not know who this young lady is, but I do know who you are, and if you like I will tell you in half a dozen words."

"Let us see."

"You are a partisan of Cardinal Richelieu."

"I!"

"You yourself."

"And how, if you please?"

"How? Because his Eminence has declared war without quarter upon the great feudal nobles of the Crown, on all gentlemen, on all men of rank, and you are his accomplice."

"How so?"

"You have just told me yourself that your

clients are exclusively persons of quality . . . so, have you sworn to extirpate the nobility?"

"Monsieur de Roquelaure!"

"You have plenty of patients, I expect?"

"Sir, this unseemly jesting . . ."

"And I would bet that not one escapes you."

"Sir!"

"You are right; it is your business."

"Sir!"

"You must do it in all conscience. Whom do you dispatch by preference? Barons, counts, marquises?"

"I allow no one to insult me," whistled Mathielmus in a voice that rose to a shrill falsetto, "and I have proved my competence in this district."

"Oh, I don't doubt that you have put plenty of people under the ground."

"Again!"

"And you will send plenty after them."

"Sir, you will have to give me satisfaction."

"All I can do for you, noble Mathielmus, is to pull your ears. They do not seem to me very short."

"Insolent youngster!"

"Old ignoramus!"

"I will kill you."

"Never; I'm no such fool as to take you for physician."

The doctor was blowing hard with rage. We

were in a room where the innkeeper had put his saucepan on the fire. Mathielmus took up a skimmer which had been left on the chimney, and meant to throw it in my face. I dodged the missile, and, drawing my sword, rather to frighten him than hurt him, I drove him back, pale and furious, into one of the corners. While I did so, I had cast a glance sidewise at Fanfette, and I perceived that colour was returning to her face and that she was much better. Thus reassured I devised the following termination for the joke.

At the sight of the bare sword, Master Mathielmus made an ugly grimace; propped against the wall, he shot glances at me which would have annihilated me if they had had the powers of lightning. But I was not the man to retreat before rage which was so amusingly displayed; on the contrary, I did all I could to heighten it to the utmost.

"Do not move, bastard of Hippocrates," I said, tickling his chest from time to time with the point of my sword, "do not move, but learn of what a splendid windfall you have wilfully deprived yourself by your stupid circumlocution. Ah, you were unwilling to give attention to this young lady, because you wanted to make sure first that you would be paid, and you are one of those dogs of Jews who do no service to anyone unless the service is put out at seventy per cent. interest and

permits of a casual stroke of usury. Well, learn, poisoning miscreant, who she is to whom you have refused to supply the succour of your science, if you have as much as a scrap to sell second-hand to simpletons. . . . Do you know the King of Spain ? ”

“ Not personally,” replied Mathielmus stuttering ; “ but I have heard him spoken of a great deal.”

“ He once took a fancy to a Catalonian lady named Dolorès de Costa-Réal. From this love-affair, unknown to the whole Peninsula, resulted the birth of a daughter, who has been endowed with several estates, all in the most flourishing condition, and who was ungrudgingly treated in the matter of names at her christening ; she was called Maria - Séraphina - Dolorès - Isabella - Inès de Costa-Réal, Countess of Mellaflor, Baroness of Nova-Ciudad, Marchioness of Estâtâr and Pénares and Grégor and Gustallàs. . . . This is the young woman that you have before you. Related to Philip IV., she is more or less a connection of every sovereign in Europe, and I should not be surprised to see her seated very shortly on the first vacant throne. . . . Mr. Mathielmus, I should have recommended you to her good-will if you had acted like a man of feeling, but now, after your ignoble conduct, I shall influence her mind against you as much as possible. You had better keep still.”

My sword was still playing under his chin.

"I will bring you to account for this violence," cried the doctor, beside himself with rage, "and I call on you, sir, to let me go."

"Willingly," I replied. "My time is too precious to be wasted on a silly creature of your sort. Away with you, Master Doctor, and receive the just reward of your zeal and diligence."

The last words, uttered with meaning, no doubt surprised him, for when he reached the staircase he began to turn round as if he wished to have an explanation of them; but I prevented the manœuvre, shoving him on by the shoulders and applying the sharp extremity of my right foot to the middle of the fleshy part that bulged below his middle.

This argument produced on the learned Mathielmus an unexpected re-effect. I myself supposed that he would attempt to avenge himself for such a pointed affront. But he did nothing of the sort. All that resulted was an extreme swiftness in his retreat. I fancy that at the bottom of the staircase he involuntarily went down seven or eight steps at a time. Then I listened, and discovered that all his vengeance was limited to abusing the innkeeper on account of the fall he had very nearly had. The innkeeper was disposed to retort, but Mathielmus set him down roundly, and I perceived that I need fear nothing from his rancour, for he expended it all upon another. So I thought no more of him, and turned again to

Fanfette, who had completely come to herself, and was laughing heartily over the endless name I had accorded her; but, in spite of my persuasions, she would not tell what her real name was. When she rose, she let fall the singular veil which for a moment had covered the lovely outlines of a breast as white as marble. She blushed, and her glance seemed to rebuke me for what I had dared to do. But I succeeded in convincing her that I had done it for her welfare. She pardoned me so completely that she granted me the coveted permission to do up what I had undone. It was a fresh joy for me, an ecstasy! . . . But I will not dwell on it.

We resumed our journey, and talked for a long while of Mathielmus and his farcical pretensions. When we arrived at Reims, she begged me to let her go alone to her aunt's house and not to seek to see her for some time. These were hard conditions, but I had to accept them. Fanfette had eyes which I was now powerless to resist. So I obeyed, and to recompense me for so much self-sacrifice and disinterestedness she promised to see me again some day, and to tell me her story then. But she would not fix this day of happiness.

My heart sank when I said farewell to her; and tears rose to her eyes when she offered me her cheek to kiss.

Let the reader think what he will of it, I ever remember that instant as one of the most charming

in my life. Fanfette herself seemed much affected after that adieu. She disappeared and left me alone, motionless and like one bemused, on the spot where we had exchanged our parting words.

Two days later I was back at Donchery. There I had my travelling kit packed up, and, having taken leave of my host, I set out to rejoin my regiment.

On the way I thought only of Fanfette. The air, the trees, the streams, the sun's rays, the shadows of the night, the songs of the birds—all spoke to me of Fanfette, all seemed to reflect her image, all told me that I should see her again ere long.

This presentiment, as will be shown by what follows, was fulfilled; but it was fulfilled far less promptly than I had hoped.

CHAPTER IV

A little confession—Madame de Guéménée besieged—A ball at the Hôtel Grammont—The five competitors—The Prince de Guéménée as a demi-lune—The pavane—D'Andilly's cuff—I throw it in his face—A farcical duel—I wound D'Andilly—Villejuif: Madame de Vaudreuil's country house—Mysterious noises—Madame de Guéménée's reply to my relative La Tour Roquelaure—The broken tea-service—Conjectures—The maid Pelloquin and the groom Rigobert—A voyage of discovery—The Abbé de Gondy—I suspect Madame de Guéménée of a secret understanding with him—My plans for finding out—Madame de Guéménée and Pelloquin one and the same person—I make a desperate attempt—I encounter a vigorous resistance—A surrender at discretion—A night well used—Embarrassment in the morning—A satisfactory explanation—A humorous meeting at the Tuileries—M. Béchamel—A wager—A kick—My victim thanks me—A breakfast in his honour.

ONE of the most singular amours was certainly that upon which I embarked at this time with the Princesse de Guéménée. She was, beyond question, one of the most remarkable ladies of the Court, and in the eyes of many people she would have been considered worthy of a king's favour. I confess that the recollection of Fanfette did not avail to protect me from the seductions of all sorts which enmeshed me in their golden threads, and as soon

as I returned to Paris I found myself a prisoner in new bonds. At this ingenuous confession I can hear the sentimental sort of women protest and raise a hue and cry against me. I cannot help it; I have to be genuine before everything, because this book is a kind of unbosoming. Change was my sphere, inconstancy my life; and among those ladies who take my candour in bad part, I wager there will be found some prudes whose conscience, if it were examined through a magnifying glass, would offer the diverting spectacle of more than one pet sin, hitherto carefully concealed from all eyes.

My first meeting with the Princess after the Sedan campaign was at a ball at the Maréchal de Grammont's. I had previously met her on several occasions at the Palais Royal, in the company of Mademoiselle de Rohan, without bestowing much attention on her; but she was so beautiful, so tantalising, so sought after that night, that I was drawn into the following of her triumphal car, and meant not to leave it. I was not the only follower who was in this mood. Her beauty and her heart were literally besieged, and it really was a question who should take them by assault. The principal competitors, as far as I remember, were D'Andilly, Saint-Mégrin, Châtillon, D'Avaugour, and I. The Prince de Guéménée, who, 'fore Gad, still suffered from the foible of being jealous about his wife, was on the spot, describing an enchanted circle as he

moved round and round her. At times he acted like a demi-lune constructed before the rampart of a fort. But he was not equal to his task, and it must be owned he made a poor kind of fortification. Besides, I think that even then he was attempting a certain Madame de Pelussin, of whom we shall speak later, and that she was a great trouble to him when his wife was present, for she used to reproach him with sharing himself between them, and threaten that she would tolerate it no longer. Thus placed between two fires, Prince de Guéménée was not a very formidable Argus to us suitors, when we consider the false position in which he was and the appearances he had to keep up.

That night I was unlucky. Madame de Guéménée danced two pavaues with D'Andilly and danced but one with me. This put me so out of humour that, perceiving one of D'Andilly's ruffles had fallen, I picked it up and, without more ado, threw it in his face. We were on the point of leaving; my rival, hurt to the quick by an affront which everyone had witnessed, made me a little sign that I understood perfectly. He went out; I followed him, and at a hundred and fifty paces from the Hôtel de Grammont, under the flickering light in an old lantern, we drew, as if the devil were in us. I never saw a more laughable duel. The light was so bad that we thrust almost at random, and a wall which was close to us received a fine punish-

ing; but little by little we grew accustomed to the darkness, and then, thanks to a brighter illumination afforded by the lamp, that had perhaps shed a snuffy end of its wick, I noticed that D'Andilly was giving ground. The moment was opportune. I lunged at all hazards, and felt my sword bend with the impact. On my honour, I thought I had killed him, and I should have felt all the regret in the world. Happily, he was but hit in the arm, and if the moment's pain had not made him drop his weapon, he could have resumed the bout without difficulty. I fancy he was less generous than I, and felt a strong desire to send me to the shades. The blood which he lost in profusion made him abandon this churlish plan, and saved me a visit to Pluto. I escorted him home myself, and saw him into a well-warmed bed, where he immediately fell into a rather violent fever, which, however, left him at the end of a few hours.

Our encounter was talked about, and when on the morrow I called upon Madame de Guéménée, I thought I could discern that the effect of *the ruffle* had been admirable. That little outburst of anger was a tribute to her charms, and she was pleased with me for it. But I do not know whether I should have compassed my purpose had it not been for the little incident that I am about to relate, an incident which at first filled me with grave anxiety about my Princess's virtue, but had at least

the merit of hastening the conclusion to which all my desires tended.

About a fortnight after my duel with D'Andilly, Madame de Vaudreuil, a little woman whose nobility was very doubtful, but who had a talent for getting herself received everywhere, and was rich into the bargain—for she had married the wealthiest ship-owner of Rochelle—Madame de Vaudreuil, I say, had formed the plan of entertaining the best society of Paris at her château of Villejuif during the summer. When I learned that Madame de Guéménée had gone there without her husband, I made no difficulty about accepting Madame de Vaudreuil's invitation; she herself was a woman of about forty, and, strange to say, had no pretensions unsuitable to her age; she entertained extremely well and with thorough cordiality.

When I arrived there, I found a merry party. There was Madame de Courcelles, who never presented her husband with a child who was his own; La Tour Roquelaure, one of my relatives, and as harebrained as myself; Madame de Comminges, who was at that time his mistress; Monsieur and Madame de Brégis; Ménage, and two or three other persons of no account. D'Andilly was not there, a fact which delighted me, for I thought it was he who had the best chance with Madame de Guéménée, and it will shortly be seen how far I was out in my reckoning.

La Tour Roquelaure was not in my way, for he was continually in attendance on Madame de Comminges, to such an extent that everyone said he made himself too conspicuous. M. de Brégis did nothing but keep guard upon his wife, who gave him a great deal of trouble at a later time, and of whom we shall speak again. As for Ménage, he was a handsome fellow enough, but his air of weak health and his frequent attacks of sciatica made me look upon him as a rival from whom I had little to fear.

It seemed as if life would pass in the merriest fashion at Madame de Vaudreuil's. We rode in the morning, we all assembled at every meal, and we played games, which were varied by little discussions on M. Chapelain's last poem, or "*l'Astrée*," by M. d'Urfé; in a word, we left no time for ennui, and each one did his best to contribute to the pleasure of all. As for me, I denounce myself frankly, I only thought of Madame de Guéménée, and did not give her a moment's truce. I helped her to mount her horse, I looked after her at table, I was always ready first to turn over her music; in a word, I paid my court to her as a man who knows his difficulties and means to triumph in spite of them, come what will. Notwithstanding all this, my suit, as I said above, made no progress, and in love he who does not advance is losing ground.

At length Madame de Vaudreuil, one morning at breakfast—perhaps without intending it—brought all the elements of a rare storm into this dead calm. We had done due honour to a final round of maraschino, and each one was preparing to go to his room, either to dress or take an hour of siesta after the Castilian manner, which pleased us infinitely, when our hostess detained us by saying that she wanted to take us into her confidence and, as she thought her little story would interest all of us, she begged everyone to remain. Madame de Vaudreuil's wish was a command, so we seated ourselves around her, and she spoke as follows :

“I do not know, my dear friends, if you are quick of hearing, but I am sure I am not, and especially at night, when I sleep like the grossest workman among the common people, or, in the expressive phrase of Cardinal de la Valette, ‘like a spiked cannon.’ To rouse me from sleep something like an earthquake or the explosion of a powder magazine would be needed. . . . Well, just imagine that last night, between one and two in the small hours, I was awakened with a start.”

It was a promising beginning; the men and women who were listening made a little movement, as an interested audience does. I directed a rapid glance of scrutiny upon all of them. Was the remark that follows really an effect of that instinctive scrutiny, or did it come to me afterwards,

as the result of circumstances that happened at a later time? I cannot tell. But I can assert that Madame de Guéménée appeared to me to have grown pale. The effect was, however, so slightly perceptible that I would not pledge myself to it on oath. Let my observation be taken, then, for what it was at the time, a pure and simple supposition, a suspicion with nothing to justify it as yet . . . and let us proceed with the tale.

"You know," Madame de Vaudreuil continued, "that I sleep in the second story of the wing that overlooks the park, and that my neighbours are M. Ménage on the floor above me and Madame de Guéménée and her maid on the floor below me. M. Ménage," she resumed, indicating him by a gesture, "has assured me that he heard nothing. And you, my charming friend, can you throw any light on the subject?"

"None," replied the Princess with perfect self-possession. "You speak of sleeping, my good Vaudreuil; but my sleep is known as proof against all assaults. I never sleep so well as at Paris in my husband's company, and yet his behaviour at night would suffice to rouse a dead woman. . . ."

"He overwhelms you with attentions and besieges you with entreaties," La Tour Roquelaure ventured to say; "if I were in his place I should do the same."

"No, Monsieur le Chevalier, he snores."

After the outburst of merriment which greeted this conjugal sally of the Princess, Madame de Vaudreuil resumed :

"I have never had the pleasure of hearing M. de Guéménée snore, and after what the Princess has told us, I don't for a moment doubt that he excels in it. But last night's clatter was ten times as bad as he could be. You know the room on the ground floor which leads to the garden, and you know that yesterday there was a little table in the middle of the room on which stood a china tea-service. . . . Well, someone struck against the table in passing . . . and the tea-service is broken."

"What a pity!" everyone exclaimed; "and you have no suspicion . . . how . . .?"

"I cannot make it out. No one has occupied that wing within the last week but Madame de Guéménée, M. Ménage and I. Did a ghost insinuate himself through a crack in the roof? Did the devil glide in through the keyhole? Who is good at solving puzzles here? As for me, I give up explaining this one."

We all listened to this account with a curiosity which we were at no pains to conceal, but it was plain that Madame de Guéménée felt a perceptible embarrassment and uneasiness above the rest; and, in fact, if this were matter for gossip, the suspicions and the conjectures would fall upon her. So all

eyes were turned upon her with amused inquisitiveness. All of a sudden she resumed her calm and smiling manner, and, having indicated by a movement as of one telling confidential news, that she thought she had hit on the solution, she said in a half-whisper :

"It is not very clever of me to guess the secret, for I became possessed of it several days ago. Perhaps discretion should prompt me to be silent about it, but I see you are all so interested that I will have pity on you."

We gathered around Madame de Guéménée, who continued in the same low tone :

"Do you know Rigobert, Madame de Vaudreuil's groom ?"

"Of course we know him ; yesterday he took us to the wood at Billettes. He is a handsome fellow."

"Well, this handsome fellow has certain honest intentions about a maid in my service, who occupies the room next mine. In a word, I have every reason to believe that he is Pelloquin's lover. She asked my consent to this marriage a few days ago. I gave it, and the ceremony is to take place very soon."

"Poor souls, they were in a hurry. . . . A moment of impatience fell to their lot," said Madame de Vaudreuil.

"And they broke your tea-service," I added, laughing.

The explanation satisfied everybody except me. Being very much smitten with Madame de Guéménée, I did not take my eyes off her, and I thought I discerned in her sprightliness, in her very candour, something affected and beside her true character. Absorbed by this thought—this suspicion, if you like the word better—I quitted Madame de Vaudreuil, meditating upon the scene. The story of Pelloquin, all ready to hand, seemed to me like a fairy tale. As a fact, Pelloquin existed, for we shall find her later in the service of Madame de Sully. She was a taking girl, and well deserved to have swains, even in a higher class than the groom. But how should Madame de Guéménée be so precisely informed about the secret loves of her maid? While I was reflecting on these matters, I came to a meadow about half a league distant from Madame de Vaudreuil's house. I crossed the meadow, and having noticed a coppice of trees where I might expect to find some shade, I hastened my pace to arrive there the sooner. Suddenly I descried a little house (it is a compliment to give it the name) on the left side of the road. If the cot were ugly enough, the situation was charming. I was busy with other thoughts while I looked at it, scrutinised it, when I saw—whom?

The little Abbé de Gondy.

He did not perceive me, and I was able to put a string of questions to myself, which I answered as best I could.

“What is the little abbé doing here, in this remote country? a country where only tanned skins, dirty fingers, red eyes, patched frocks and spattered legs are to be seen! Assuredly he is not compelled to be here by the duties of his cure. He has come of his own accord to follow up an amour or a quarrel, which will come to light in the end, for the sovereign reason that everything ends in that way. So there is something serious to detect, or something very comic to be seen.” It was unnatural that Gondy should be lodged in a wretched little hovel, the windows of which looked as if they would dance in the wind. For what, or for whom, had he come?

A sudden light—derived from heaven or the inferno, from below or from above, I cannot tell which—illuminated my mind at the instant. I imagined that Gondy had set himself to follow the Guéménée, and my memory very opportunely recalling certain suspicious and impertinent sighings, lately vented in my presence, delivered me at once from the fatigues and disputations of uncertainty. I believed I was sure of the fact. It was a sad conclusion beyond all question, and one which sharply spurred my jealousy; and yet, hard though it be to credit it, I was not at heart sorry for the circumstance. It excited me, kindled my blood and my nerves. As I had not the good fortune to succeed with her, I meant at least to have the gratification of revenge.

It remained for me to bring my guns to bear properly. Supposing that I were not deceived, the most important thing appeared to be that I should cut the communications between the two camps, so that the two armies could not act in concert, which would inevitably have led to my complete defeat. Now, as they had had an assignation the day before, I concluded they would have the like for the succeeding night. If the lady took it into her head, from prudence or some other motive, to countermand her lover's coming, the triumph of my tactics would consist in intercepting the message, so that matters should perforce remain as they then stood. I returned at once to Madame de Guéménée's side, in the firm resolve not to leave her a moment's liberty throughout the day.

When night came it found me still in attendance upon her, attentive, zealous, loverlike, even wearisome to all seeming, by the very fact that I was exaggerating those rather insipid qualities which lose their value when they are foolishly overworked. The fact is that I was extremely ardent, and that her clever coquetries poured oil upon the flames. At length came the hour to retire, and I remained with the assurance, in so far as one can be sure of anything in this world, that if Madame de Guéménée had in her retinue some handsome Adonis like Buckingham, or some clever but ugly aspirant like Gondy, it had been impossible for her to tell

him, either by word of mouth or writing, the diverting tale we had heard in the morning.

I was lodged in a part of the building which was at a distance from the arena that I wished to watch, and to get myself at night into the room where the tea-service had been broken was neither an easy nor an overnice piece of work. The means I used to introduce myself there, when everyone had withdrawn, were as simple as possible. I will call things by their names, though it give them an ill aspect. This device would have made a thief envious. I bade good night to Madame de Vaudreuil just as she was withdrawing to her bed-chamber, and I went downstairs, promising her that I would see all was shut and fastened with the greatest care. But no sooner had I gone down and the servants were preparing to bolt and bar than I ordered them, as from Madame de Vaudreuil, to go to bed, saying that I had some reading to finish, and that I would make the place fast myself. They went off, and I was left alone. The critical moment was approaching. I put out the lights and stretched myself comfortably on a soft sofa, imagining a thousand adventures, each more ravishing than the other, and awaiting the upshot.

The upshot was decided sooner than I had expected. I had been taking my ease for scarcely half an hour on the improvised bed when I heard the gravel scrunch under rapid footsteps, which,

light as they were, were assuredly the steps of a man. I ran to one of the windows, lifted a corner of the blue curtain which completely draped it, and saw a slight shape with all the appearance of an elegant and worldly abbé gliding towards the nearest garden-walk like a shadow in a ballet at the opera. It was Gondy. What a commencement for the grave, serious, busy career of the Cardinal de Retz!

The abbé was not coming towards the house—an odd circumstance which gratified me particularly, for I had no desire to find myself face to face with him. He made his way towards a little clump of trees which I had already examined once or twice with an envious eye, telling myself that here must be a delicious place for whispered conversations of love, at night, under the very nose, as it were, of heaven and the stars. Fortunate Gondy! So he was not satisfied with running deeper into debt than any other gentleman of the Court and fighting his quarrels through thick and thin, but he must have the prettiest women of the time, the most daring sentiments, and the most fashionable love affairs! What progress, what alarming progress, he had made since the time when—still a mere child—he had been received a canon of Notre-Dame de Paris!

As I saw him move towards the coppice, jealousy possessed me, and I nearly burst into a passion; I accuse myself of the weakness here candidly. It deserves to be pardoned, for Madame de Guéménée

was extremely beautiful, and I was ardently enamoured. I seated myself to await the continuation of a scene which had begun so admirably. The more I thought, the more convinced I was that I had surmised the truth. The Princess would not have charged Pelloquin with an imaginary sin for nothing, and Gondy did not wander in the park at night to pick plums or give himself a course of botany.

My reflections had carried me to this point when the rustling of a dress in the corridor set my ears on the alert. I had but one fear, that astonishment might cause the errant fair to utter a cry which would rouse the household. A woman appeared at the door which opened upon the foot of the staircase, and I guessed rather than recognised that she was Madame de Guéménée. A happy inspiration came to me at the instant. I coughed slightly; it was a master-stroke, as will be seen, and nothing could have been more advantageous to my plans.

Upon this little indication of hoarseness, Madame de Guéménée no doubt believed that she recognised the slightly cracked voice of the Abbé de Gondy—the darkness of night is so treacherous—for she said quickly :

“Is it you?”

“Who should it be but I?” I replied, lowering my voice to the utmost. “Yes; it is I, and I hope you will pardon the rashness of the conduct, to

which I have been led by a cruel jealousy, a boundless despair and a mad love."

Madame de Guéménée expected probably a different style of address, for she repeated, recoiling a step or two:

"Answer; it is you, is it not?"

"Yes, yes indeed; it is I, Gaston-Jean-Baptiste, Baron de Roquelaure, wounded on the body at the fight at La Marfée, wounded to the heart by your divine charms."

It was worthy of the *-Astrée*. The beautiful Princess uttered a little cry, to which I paid no attention, and I continued without a pause:

"Yes, I am Roquelaure, and you, my adorable girl, are Pelloquin, a superb young woman, to whose perfections there are wanting only satin dresses, pearl necklaces, young and gallant lovers, and some old money-grubber, half deaf and quite blind, to serve as your husband."

"You are mistaken," said a soft, trembling voice.

"No, the deuce take me if I am mistaken; I recognise you perfectly, rarest of serving-women, who deserve a throne. You are Pelloquin, a handsome brunette with dark eyes that a bishop would get damned for. You are Pelloquin, a charming little rogue that kills whom she will with her glances, and whose virtue, in open day, wears a cruel air of mercilessness and austerity. Not that I would find fault with you, my dear girl, for keeping

up appearances, if I knew that you were reasonable and approachable. But hear what they tell me. They say you have a fancy for one Rigobert, a dirty groom, who cannot fail to carry a vile smell of the stables and filth upon his legs. Pelloquin, you have brilliant chances. I will secure your future, I will make your way in the world. You will grant me this favour, to see no more of Rigobert."

"It is impossible," said the voice.

"Impossible! so he's very handsome?"

"He's not ugly."

"And your heart is firmly set on him?"

"He is going to marry me."

At this reply I could not check my mad desire to laugh.

"Ha! ha! ha! That's the finest answer in the world, Pelloquin. He is going to marry you; that's your reason. Well, there's no common sense in your reason, let me tell you."

I fell into the intimate style of addressing her as "thou," and she commented upon it.

"Did I so?" I replied. "I don't know if I did; it's very likely. But that's not the question. Come, my dear, let us talk sense, if possible. I have seen Rigobert once or twice. He's a good-for-nothing fellow and not suited to you. What would you do with a ridiculous great yokel like that to take your arm, you who are so pink and

white and rounded ; and he so black, and uncouth and ill-smelling. You would be like a flower on a dung-heap."

"Please have done."

"What a fine sight when his gross arm surrounds that slim and admirably moulded waist!"

"Monsieur de Roquelaure!"

At this moment Madame de Guéménée succeeded in half-escaping from my embrace, and exclaimed, still disguising her voice:

"You persist in tormenting me, and you will drive me to desperation. . . . I am going back upstairs to my room . . ."

"I shall follow you."

"Then I shall bolt the door."

"If so I must break the door down."

"It would raise a scandal, and ruin me."

"That's to say, rescue you . . . and that means would be as good as any other. Such a slander as that must come to Rigobert's ears. And so I shall end a ridiculous connection which could but result in your wasting your whole life. I seek to promote your fortunes and your happiness, and a little scandal more or less won't stand in my way if I can make you rich and happy against your will."

"But you will be compromising yourself."

"I—compromised because I was found in the company of Mademoiselle Pelloquin, a girl that the Padishah would pay a million piastres to possess!

No, no; love cares nothing for heraldry, and where women are concerned, the prettiest are the noblest. . . . Roquelaure the lover of Pelloquin! It will be a conquest that will be talked of, it's an amour that will do me credit."

And I designedly raised my voice in uttering the last words. Poor Madame de Guéménée trembled like a leaf. At last she said, placing her hand on my mouth:

"Oh, keep silence, for pity's sake keep silence."

"I'm at your orders, my pretty child, at your orders. Do you want me to be quiet and cool? Well, now I'm as quiet as a fish, and tractable as a lamb. Let us sit down here, side by side, and talk without getting angry. We are alone. No one will come to disturb us. I must tell you my confession. But," I said, breaking off, "there is one essential lacking. I feel your hand in mine, I know that you are there, close to me, but all that is not enough. I want to see you—to admire you. I have tinder-box and steel upon me, and I will strike a light."

Madame de Guéménée leaped up impetuously.

"I forbid you," she said.

"And I beseech you to allow me."

"I entreat you."

"And I implore."

And as we spoke I had shut and bolted the doors, and I had noisily seized a candlestick.

"Monsieur de Roquelaure, I beg you . . ."

"But why?"

"Because it would displease me."

"What a whim!"

"Well, a whim . . . but there is no appeal from it."

"No appeal, no appeal," I murmured in a doubting tone, "you speak as you choose, Pelloquin my little friend, and if I took a whim . . . men sometimes do . . . it has been known to happen."

"You would light that candle — against my will?"

"I should be grieved to go so far, but . . ."

"O Heaven!"

"Do you know, Pelloquin, I said, sighing profoundly, "that you have treated me very ill? As far as I can understand, you set great store on this darkness that surrounds us; suppose I took my revenge by scattering it?"

"You would not do it."

"That depends."

"You are not so unkind as that."

"Oh, vengeance takes us a long way sometimes."

"So you will not grant me a favour that I beg for, that I pray for?"

"Perhaps . . . on certain conditions."

I had prepared my tinder-box and tinder, I struck sharply and a spark flew.

"I accept them all," said Madame de Guéménée, seizing my arm.

She was at her wit's end. I was unwilling to abuse my advantage. I placed her on the sofa, and, kneeling before her, I devoted myself to confirming her in the advantageous idea that I really took her for Pelloquin.

"Compose yourself, my little friend," I said, clasping both her hands with ardour, "and above all fear nothing from me. I will only do what you allow me to do, and I hold that a gallant man should never be indebted to unworthy violence for those favours, the free gift of which makes all their value."

"So," she murmured, "you really love Pelloquin?"

"Of course."

"It is strange . . . I thought, I fancied I saw . . ."

"Well, Pelloquin? I want to know the whole of your thought."

"I had imagined . . . there, help me a little . . . I did suppose that you had a liking for my mistress, Madame de Guéménée."

"Ah, what name have you uttered now?" I exclaimed in a mysterious tone. "You imprudent girl—if you were overheard!"

"Who could overhear us in this room?"

"She, perhaps."

"Oh, never trouble about that; she is quietly sleeping at this moment."

"I feel sure of it, but—well—listen, Pelloquin; full and complete frankness is a fine thing, and I mean to employ it with you. It puts me more at ease, and I can show you the depths of my soul, because I know the depths of yours already. If it were not so, the game would not be fair, and that would be unjust. Who has not his little secret sins? You have a liking for Rigobert, and I have a wild passion for Madame de Guéménée. That is the truth, I will not deny it. But why should that interfere with our loves, Pelloquin? Even now when I am near you, it seems to me as if she were there, she heard me—she whom I love."

"Who? Madame de Guéménée?"

"She herself—in person."

"You must be dreaming—or else you are mad."

"No, my little Pelloquin, I am not mad, but I am in love. . . . I am dreaming, if you will, but I am not asleep."

"You are very odd; you make a declaration to me, and you have the face to tell me that you love my mistress."

"Well, you love Rigobert."

"That's different."

"It's exactly the same thing."

"Then you own that it's a simple whim?"

"Certainly—and what in the world is better

than a caprice? Without caprices, would not life be a perpetual inferno? Think of the monotony; we should die of too much sameness. It is change that animates and revives us, and fresh loves renew us. Experience will tell you so in time, as it has told me. Let me teach you to-day, Pelloquin, your first lesson in that rare science. I am very young, but I have lived in great luxury, and I have admired many women who did not excel you, but who had velvet dresses and illustrious names. That is why it delights me so now to feel my dainty little Pelloquin near me in her linsey-woolsey bodice and white linen skirt. Are you not placed just as I am, and after hearing the rough sighs of a clodhopper like Rigobert, is it not natural that you should be glad to learn from Roquelaure how the gentlemen of the Court speak, sigh . . . and love?"

I got no answer.

"You hate me," I whispered to the Princess.

"No," she answered with a quivering movement; "but I wish to be true to . . ."

"Rigobert?"

"As if there were any question of Rigobert!"

"What? There is someone beside him?"

"It is not that."

"Then what is it?"

"This: I am afraid of being compromised by you, by your attentions and indiscretion. . . . Rigobert is going to marry me . . . he is a

jealous, touchy man . . . and I could not always feel sure that after to-night—no single look, no single word . . .”

“I understand. It will be a terrible penalty, but I accept it.”

“I require that you shall never even remind me of this meeting.”

“It is granted.”

“If you do so, if you ever say a syllable to me about it, I shall answer, without a trace of embarrassment, that you are a fop and a liar, and that I do not know what you mean.”

“I shall bear it all without complaint.”

“You swear to that?”

“I swear to it.”

I will not give the tale at greater length. The assurance of unbounded discretion made the *soi-disant* Pelloquin the sprightliest and most affable creature in the world. By daybreak I had silently ascended to my room, and everything had been restored to its usual order.

On the morrow I met Madame de Guéménée in the middle of the park. She was pale, and she could not prevent the blush which mounted to her cheeks when she saw me. I approached in a careless way, and bowed with every sign of profound respect. I made my pace accord with hers, and we walked side by side for a few moments without addressing one another. When we came to the

head of a by-path more thickly grown than the others, I begged her to be seated upon a turf bank there, and I said to her in an earnest tone :

"Madame la Princesse, I have a confession to make to you."

"A confession—you, M. de Roquelaure !"

"A confession," I continued, "which you will, perhaps, think singular ; but I ought to make it to you, and I shall do so. Madam, I declared my love to you a long time ago . . ."

"Monsieur !"

"I know that you resent my love."

"Monsieur le Baron !"

"That it is utterly obnoxious to you . . ."

"I beg you . . ."

"And that you have chosen the Abbé de Gondy in preference to me. He found means to please you . . . it is all fair play . . . and I have nothing to say against it."

"There I have to check you," said Madame de Guéménée quickly, "for though I do not think myself obliged to give account of my conduct to anyone, I desire to enlighten you about that affair. Here is a letter that I have just written for the abbé. Please read it."

I took the note eagerly, and read as follows :

MY DEAR ABBÉ,—Your advances are but wasted trouble. I do not love you. Who is mistress of her own heart ? You have caused me to commit an imprudence

for which I cannot forgive myself. To walk in the moonlight in order to tell one another calmly that we cannot be lovers is a proceeding unworthy of a wise man and a woman of the world. We might be seen, met, or spied upon . . . and tell me frankly what would be thought of it. People would suppose that we were lovers, and rightly. Leave Villejuif as soon as possible, and I assure you that I shall have true pleasure in seeing you again in Paris.

Farewell, my dear Abbé; let us remain friends.

I let my arm drop in my amazement.

"After reading that," resumed Madame de Guéménée softly, "have you anything else to tell me?"

"Yes, madam," I answered, recovering my composure to some extent; "it remains for me to retract what I dared to assert about Gondy, and as far as concerns me, I must say—it is not very easy to say it—I must say—that I no longer love you."

"Ah! what a declaration!"

"It is not gallant—but it is true."

"And it is to my severity, I suppose, that I should attribute . . ."

"No; you have a rival."

"Far above me? Perhaps the Queen!"

"Far below you; your maid."

"Pelloquin!"

"Yes."

"You flatter me indeed! So you love that girl!"

But if you wish to continue to see her you will have to quit this house . . . for you will not often meet her here in future . . . since it is my intention to dismiss her to-day."

"Why so?"

"How should that concern you? Must I be the accomplice of your caprice? So you think her rarely beautiful, this servants' hall wonder?"

"When you are before your glass, look at yourself, and you will have an idea what she really is."

"Well, that is really too much—now I am told I resemble my waiting-woman."

"So closely that I was deceived last night."

"What? You really knew?"

Madame de Guéménée was extremely affrighted. She hid her face in her handkerchief, and remained for some minutes in a posture that revealed keen emotion and strong annoyance. Her bosom heaved irregularly, and her uneven gait gave evidence of the turbulent thoughts that pressed upon her, and brought trouble and confusion to her heart. My love and my enthusiasm were doubled at this sight; I covered her hand with burning kisses.

At length she stopped, and, standing before me, looked at me with an earnestness that was full of tender interest; then she said, extending her hand to me:

"Well, I would sooner have it so. I shall not send Pelloquin away."

* * * * *

A week after this *campaign*—for it may well be called so—I returned to Paris, whither I was ordered upon a matter which concerned M. d'Enghien. On the day after my arrival I was crossing the Tuileries with D'Avaugour, Sourdis and Dugué-Bagnols, and we were, by the way, in a merry mood, when we noticed one Béchamel, walking slowly with the air of a man thinking deeply. He was the king of imbeciles and fops. Further, his pride was immense. These hints may convey a slight notion of the man. I was in a laughing humour, we had breakfasted well, and we had as yet found no one on whom to vent our satisfaction.

"Egad, gentlemen," I said to my companions, "we are looking out for diversion, and here is the material ready to hand. Would anyone of you take offence at a trick played on Béchamel?"

"Not the least in the world," they all answered at once.

"He is no relation of yours, D'Avaugour?"

"God forbid!"

"He is not a friend of yours, Sourdis?"

"Heaven deliver me!"

"And you have no fondness for him at the bottom of your heart, Bagnols?"

"All the kindness he deserves, and it does not weigh upon me."

"Well, my friends, I will own that I have a furious longing to give him a kick on the rump."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Give *him* one?"

"Him in person."

"You would not do it!"

"Is that what you all three think?"

"It is."

"Well, I wager I will do it, against all of you."

"It's a mad idea."

"Do I claim to be wise?"

"You will make yourself another enemy."

"That is my concern; will you take the bet?"

"Yes. But first, what is the bet to be?"

"A good breakfast deserves a good supper. If I win, to-night's supper is at your charges; if I lose, at mine."

"Taken."

"I will go further than that," I continued, before moving off. "I say that Béchamel will thank me."

"That is too much."

"I say so."

"We shall see."

"Watch, then."

I walked on the tip of my toes till I was within range of my man. Then solemnly taking the distance and measuring my reach, I made my leg describe a graceful curve, and swiftly launching it with no common force, I planted the point of my shoe in the midst of his rump.

The greeting was rough, and Béchamel, whose stomach had protruded slightly as the result, turned round, purple in the face and with clenched fists, for he was a man of violent temper.

I saw by the width to which he opened his mouth that he was going to utter a vigorous oath. I stopped him by a gesture, and said in a grieved tone:

"Oh, how sad, Monsieur Béchamel! I am distressed indeed, I am more than distressed! But why are you so like the Duc de Grammont? I mistook you for him."

"I, Monsieur de Roquelaure?" said Béchamel, whose face suddenly grew mild. "I should esteem myself happy if I had the honour to resemble . . ."

"Our dear Grammont! Why, it is all the talk at Court. You have his deportment, my dear Béchamel, his air of high distinction, his manners, which, as you know, are the best of any gentleman in France . . . evidently, Nature used the same mould for you both."

"You flatter me."

"I mean it. . . . So, there is no ill-will?"

"I should think not, indeed!"

And Béchamel offered me his hand. I shook it heartily enough to put it out of joint, and returned with all speed to my comrades, who were splitting with laughter. Dugué-Bagnols, especially, had to hold his sides, and he burst out so loud that I

begged him to go a little further off, lest Béchamel should hear him.

That night we supped at the Palais-Royal, and my friends did the thing in fine style. I ought to say, out of regard for the truth, that Béchamel was our first toast. We owed him as much as that.

CHAPTER V

A word about the Abbé de Gondy—Richelieu's terrible pastime—The executioner and Cinq-Mars—M. Méranne d'Amber-ton—His prophecy about the Cardinal—A distich by Grotius—The battle of Honnecourt—I am taken by the Spaniards—A letter from M. de Voiture—The Castilian captain's mistress—What Richelieu said when he was dying—A souvenir visit to Madame de Lavernay—My successor—I claim the reward for my former services—I am flatly refused—I am sacrificed to the little marquis—My mortification—I swear to be revenged—My meeting with Croixville—Marinelli's wine-shop—Spanish wine—Croixville falls under the table—The hour of the swain—A sleepless night—A billet-doux.

THE age was preparing men who should be great in war. Never had a period been seen in France when the craze for the sword was carried to such lengths, and the furore for the duel so exceeded all due bounds. The rank of churchman, far from mollifying manners, seemed in the case of certain clerics to be but an additional reason for showing themselves quarrelsome and apt, in an excessive degree, to take offence. In the most recent times there had been many examples of this strange inclination. Cardinal de la Valette, son to the Duc d'Epéron, and a man born rather to carry a musket than to say mass, had caused himself to be buried, in spite of Richelieu's displeasure, with

mitre on head and sword on thigh, wearing his brassards and breastplate under his golden cope. The little Abbé de Gondy, who afterwards became famous as Cardinal de Retz, and of whom we have spoken in the foregoing chapter, had scarcely got himself received a canon of Notre-Dame de Paris, when he scandalised the town and the Court by his notorious escapades. Being enamoured of the Duchâtelet, whose titular lover was the Comte d'Harcourt, he called that gentleman out, and thus compromised his dignity as a holy man and the reputation, which by the way was already impaired, of the fair lady who was the cause of the encounter. A few days later he happened to be at Vincennes with Praslin. At this time, and amidst such profusion of true bravery and high soldierly worth, certain names shone with exceptional lustre—the Vicomte de Turenne, who, after passing his life upon the battlefield, was destined to die upon *the bed of honour*, as his comrades in arms declared when they learned that he had been struck by a cannon-ball when he was proceeding to reconnoitre the enemy's camp; M. de la Meilleraye, a nephew of the Cardinal and much favoured by him, but none the less an excellent soldier; Maréchal de Fabert, redoubtable indeed at the head of his *canons*; and the Prince de Condé, whose private misdeeds during the civil war have not obliterated his high merits and great reputation.

I was but a sorry hero among these giants, to whom the ancients would have surely attributed divine honours, yet I well remember that I was as proud and happy over my first skirmish as if I had been a new Alexander and had routed Darius and his host on the plains of Arbela. My delight at being wounded would have surprised any man who has not learned the pleasures of the camp and therefore knows not how a man values himself when he has shed his blood upon the scene of his first exploits. The warlike surroundings of which I spoke just now, calling them to mind designedly, affected me without my marking their influence, and all my dreams were of battle array, salvoes of arquebuses, and towns captured by assault. My sentimental adventure at Donchery, and my still more sentimental journey to Champagne, had only diverted me for a moment from these headstrong notions of war and destruction, and I aspired to a single happiness—that of receiving a new commission from his Eminence the Cardinal, a new commission that would supply me with the means to take my revenge and prove my worth.

My jubilant illusions were chilled by a sinister event, which brought a terrible and bloody picture before my eyes. For just when I was venturing forth into such fair dreams of the future, I learned that the gate of such a future, though it seemed

open for all, had been mercilessly closed upon two unhappy gentlemen: their heads had fallen on the scaffold under the very eyes of the old Cardinal, as he lay dying. I had seen Cinq-Mars twice or thrice at the Court, merry and sure of himself, in the pink of the fashion, a man whose charm lay in his extravagances, those extravagances for which everyone pardons proud and joyous youth; Cinq-Mars had been executed on the Place des Terreaux at Lyons, in the character of an accomplice of Fontrailles and the Princes in a conspiracy planned with the connivance of Olivares, the Spanish Minister. De Thou had followed him to the scaffold, and the bungling headsman had not severed the head from the trunk till the twelfth blow of the axe. . . . These particulars disgusted me, and, strong as my conviction was about the loyalty a man owes to his king, I could not but think that a king's power is a grievous gift from heaven if it must be preserved by such cruel acts, and at the price of banishing all mercy. For the first time I called in question my devotion to the person of the King my master, and this was a kind of sacrilege which my father the Maréchal de Roquelaure would assuredly not have pardoned in me had he been alive. But I soon relinquished this error, which my first emotions of astonishment might excuse; and when I thought of the Cardinal's condition, of his terrible outbursts of anger and his accesses of . . .

unbridled rage, I came to the conclusion that the execution of M. de Cinq-Mars and his friend was such a savage gratification as deputy-tyrants sometimes allow themselves when, like wolves or tigers, they hunger for men's flesh and are athirst for blood. In the troubled lives of kings' favourites there come hours of that kind. And as for Richelieu, he was thinking far less of a plot with Spain than of rivalry against himself, and in Cinq-Mars he struck the man whose gracious bearing had made him a dangerous competitor. Above all, he had struck the man whom the King himself condemned when he gave him the title of "dear friend" one day in jest.

I was overcome with grief and indignation, and sought to relieve my melancholy by confiding in a friend. The first whom I met—I remember it as if it had happened yesterday—was M. Méranne d'Amberton, a captain of light horse and fellow-campaigner, whom I knew to be an avowed enemy of the Cardinal. I deplored in his presence what had been done at Lyons, and protested against the cold cruelty of the executions of MM. de Cinq-Mars and de Thou.

"What motives," said I, "can have made Richelieu decide to use so great severity?"

"No other than the one I am about to tell you, M. d'Amberton answered calmly; "he is tortured with piles, his blood is corrupted, and pain harries

him. Let a man suffer thus and have an executioner at his beck, and he will be capable of any crime. I suspected before that the damned Cardinal would not make old bones, but after what I have learned to-day, I will wager he will not get through the year."

I made no note of M. d'Amberton's words, but my mind faithfully retained them, and the prediction was fulfilled to the letter. Before the year was out the Cardinal resigned his soul to God. His death, which occurred on the 4th of December, 1642, caused an indescribable sensation. It was as if some star had passed to its eclipse, and darkness had descended on a whole portion of the earth in an instant. Marie de Médicis had preceded her relentless persecutor to the grave by a few months, and Louis XIII. was destined to rejoin them both five months later. Did not this seem like the working of a curse?

The pitiless execution of MM. de Cinq-Mars and de Thou produced a feeling throughout all France that I will not attempt to describe. M. de Cinq-Mars had aroused every woman's pity by his chivalrous contempt of life; and there was no single person, though he were the firmest of men, that was not wrought to pity by that striking picture of pure friendship, of self-forgetfulness, which poor M. de Thou displayed.

The sight of the scaffold, the grim aspect of the

executioner, did not avail to distemper the steadfastness of their sublime resolution. The death of the two friends seemed a religious appeal to the Supreme Judge, as it was a protest against their judges upon earth. I should be sorry to have my conscience weighted by so heavy a load, and I have always thought that it burdened the Cardinal's conscience cruelly.

Among the many elegies, dirges and epitaphs that were composed upon these two unhappy victims of a minister's vindictiveness, I will select and cite, if my readers will allow, a charming distich by M. Grotius on the sad and lamentable theme. They are two lines without pretensions, yet they express a gracious idea with elegance—an idea which is full of noble sentiments. They are as follows:

O legum subtile nefas, quibus, inter amicos,
Nolle fidem frustra prodere, proditio est.

It would be impossible better to describe the pretended crime of M. de Thou, whose disinterested and devoted friendship did not fail for a moment, even in the presence of the preparations for his death.

With Richelieu there gradually disappeared from the French Court those people who lived there solely on account of their opposition to the Cardinal, or because they were his rivals. Those who had been his creatures were gradually removed, and assuredly

they were but a slight loss. And now the scene will change, but the morals, the habits and the routine will be almost the same. In the reign we are leaving we had a specimen of every kind of intrigue—the military, the sacerdotal and the feminine. The future had the like in store for us: Marillac, Soissons, and Gaston d'Orléans will be replaced by Condé, Conti, and the Duc de Longueville. Under Louis XIII. we had Mademoiselle de Lafayette, whose confessor, Père Caussin, counselled her to give ear to the King's cold amour, on the condition that he should consent to dismiss his minister. And we had Madame de Chevreuse, that heroine of gallantry who offered her favours as a reward for the assassination of this same minister—a woman on whom a hundred different judgments have been passed, though, as I at least believe, no one has laid his finger on the right explanation. By my view, Madame de Chevreuse was neither cold nor passionate in the full meaning of either word. With some, she appeared amorous to the point of frenzy; with others, severe to the point of prudishness—prodigal with one, avaricious with another, a coquette with all. But she in reality was none of this, and all that was positive in her at the bottom of her heart was her unconfessed impatience of every governance, let it be what it would—and her implacable hatred of Richelieu. Such were the women wirepullers of the Opposition at the Court

of Louis XIII. The minority of Louis XIV. will likewise show how petticoats were concerned in all the movements and all the troubles in the persons of Madame de Longueville and of Mademoiselle de Montpensier. But I will not anticipate the story; each thing shall come in its due time.

I will pass lightly over the year 1642: it was a year that France has no cause to remember with joy, and my memory of it is full of confusion. The Cardinal's death and the King's sad condition were no good auguries. After the account which I gave of the fight at La Marfée, I will only allude to the battle of Honnecourt in the briefest manner. I had the ill luck to be made prisoner there, together with Saint-Mégrin, but not before I had won the especial notice of my illustrious leaders. There was nothing very terrible in my captivity, and I was soon set free. To sum up, the commencements of my military career had not lacked a certain brilliancy, and I was thenceforth assured of the countenance of the best soldiers of my time.

In connection with my first taking the field and with my capture by the Spaniards, I was able to discern clearly who were my true friends; and from several of them I received marks of sympathy of no doubtful strain. I valued none of these expressions more than that I had from M. de Voiture, one of the brightest and most charming men of that period, who addressed to me the letter of which

I here give the exact text ; I have ever preserved the original of it.

A man may permissibly glory in his friends when these are so highly regarded and esteemed as M. de Voiture, a man whose character was as much respected as his writings were admired. It has always seemed to me, and my whole life has strengthened this opinion to a conviction, that honourable friendships leave in a way their impress on those who have the enjoyment of them, and I think no man can be too proud of an intimacy which raises him in his own eyes, as in the eyes of others.

The letter of which I speak runs as follows :

TO MONSIEUR DE ROQUELAURE.

SIR,—I know not what should have gained me the honour of your friendship, but this has cost me very dear already, for no campaign takes place but I pass many days of unhappiness from the affection I have for you, and the risks you run put me to the greatest anxiety. Yet I rejoice to see your fortune so strange that you ever find the means to win new glory in a defeated army, and that you fail not to distinguish yourself in those circumstances which are disastrous for nearly all others. In fact, sir, I think you would find no way to complain of Fortune justly ; for if she be not on your side, yet she ever brings you upon that side on which she is, and at the conclusion of every encounter you are found among the victorious. For my part, I avow myself less concerned for your liberty than for your fame. I will not feign myself afflicted at your capture, for, knowing what happened, I would rather

see you among the Spaniards than among our men. I hope, sir, you will receive at their hands the good treatment which is your desert, and I doubt not to have this wish gratified. For this is not only due to your rank, but your own qualities are quick to make their way to the good-will of those with whom you come in contact, and I am assured that the enemies who made you prisoner are now your friends. I should willingly come to keep you company among them had I the power to do so; for I exaggerate not in the least, sir, in declaring that I know nothing which I would not gladly perform to show you how grateful I am for the honour you everywhere do me in proclaiming me your friend; so that neither Paris nor the Court can offer me more pleasure than I should feel in being with you and in showing with how fervent an affection I am, etc., etc.

I have the greater gratification in committing M. de Voiture's agreeable letter to my Memoirs, because I regard it as one of the acquisitions which do me the most honour. M. de Voiture was esteemed by men of rank who held the highest places in the State, and some part of this esteem is naturally reflected upon those whom he thought fit to distinguish by his regard. He could boast of being intimate with all the noblest, wittiest and most famous men at Court; never was a reputation more rapidly gained or more firmly established. MM. Davaux and de Chavigny, and Maréchals Schombert and de Grammont honoured him with their closest friendship.

Later the Prince himself invited him to regard his house as his own; and it must be inferred, from

the affection which the King, the Queen and Cardinal Mazarin entertained for him, that he had the amiable and conciliatory character which attracts and wins all minds without effort by the sole force of uprightness and benevolence. Besides this, he was a perfect gentleman, and Madame de Montausier said of him one night at the Hôtel de Rambouillet : “ that he should never essay the portrait of a *parfait chevalier* without having his looking-glass before him.”

My captivity among the Spaniards was not relieved by any of those humorous or sportive episodes for which my relish was so keen that I never passed a day without spending some hours in seeking adventures. I slyly directed half a dozen vain sighs to an engaging girl who came each night to see the captain charged to conduct me to the place chosen for my enforced retirement. One night I even succeeded in forcibly winning a smuggled kiss.

But when I saw her so close I perceived that the fair one was no longer in her first youth, and that distance added to her charms. So I stopped half-way in the pursuit of her, and made as if I thought no more of it. I was vexed about this result, for I should have found pleasure in doing the Castilian captain an ill turn. He gave himself hectoring airs, and I disliked him extremely.

My first care when I returned to Paris was to

learn what had passed during the Cardinal's last hours. On this point I gleaned various interesting particulars. Who would have supposed it? His Eminence, before breathing his last, had, in conversation with some of his intimates, shown feelings of pity for the hapless wretches he had ruined and regret about some of his acts of severity, the recollection of which, he said, had become unbearable to him. The Comte de Rochefort, who was, as is well known, his *âme damnée*, and one of the most devoted of his creatures, declared that he had seen his master so repentant when confiding these things to him that he seemed on the point of weeping. Strange indeed! That mighty man who had reduced the Huguenots to obedience, who had snatched Catalonia, Alsace and Portugal from the House of Austria; the clever minister who had brought about so many wise and useful changes in the government, and who had organised the King's rule, in the strict meaning of the words; the pitiless tyrant whose will had cost some of the most illustrious men of the monarchy their heads, and had forced the widow of Henri le Grand to quit France; the bloodthirsty priest who surrounded himself with spies and paid executioners, who had punished a rash word of the Maréchal de Bassompierre with ten years of imprisonment, who had sent the indiscreet author of the "Cordonnière de Loudun" to the stake—this man was destined to show a crowning singularity

at his death. No man died with greater sanctity, humility and Christianity than he. He shirked none of the irksome duties of the last hour, and offered on that occasion a perfect model of repentance and contrition. Those who were about him have assured me that he retained none of the foolish vanities of the world, and that he prepared to die as a modest, fearing sinner. He besought absolution for his errors with fervour, and desired to fulfil every rite which religion prescribes with exactitude.

I had it from Rochefort that the day before his death the Curé de St. Eustache, whose obsequiousness was sometimes pushed to the extent of importunity, bent over Richelieu's bed and whispered in his ear :

“ Monseigneur, your power on earth has been great, and the mercy of God in heaven is infinite. I think that a personage of your rank may dispense with extreme unction.”

The Cardinal, who had been almost unconscious, collected himself when he heard this strange proposition, and answered the curé in a firm tone which did not admit of reply :

“ Do not forget that I am a Christian and wish to die as a Christian.”

The Abbé F——, who was but three paces from the bed, turned towards the Curé de St. Eustache and added the following words :

“ His Eminence is right. There are not two

ways of dying well in our religion, and heaven is no mere pleasure-ground where a man may enter stealthily by a back gate."

At this time I was able, consistently with my duties to the service, to enjoy a few days of leisure, and I took it into my head that I would pay a visit to Madame de Lavernay. Memory has a mighty influence upon the heart when a man is twenty and a few years older. Every sentiment, however slight it be, leaves a deep trace in the recollection; and the image of my first mistress was the more clearly impressed on my mind that a mixture of pleasure and annoyance attached to my adventure with her, and the aftermath, I may truly say, was of a most charming savour. Besides, I was glad to be able to learn from her own lips whether she regretted me at all; and I thought—albeit, I was completely cured of my foible—that in reuniting a chain so brusquely broken, I should find the same pleasure as accrues sometimes in resuming an interesting tale at the point at which one left it.

Madame de Lavernay still lived at the same place. The company was as numerous and as choice on the evening when my visit took place as it had been formerly; but I noticed that her circle was composed of quite fresh faces. There was the same profusion of chat, but the topics of conversation were far from the same. In the old times the frivolities of the day, a madrigal published by the

*Mercur*e, a witticism passed at Court, sufficed for the entertainment. The women thought of nothing but looking pretty, and the men, though they did not seek to pass for wits, endeavoured to avoid too great a silliness. But now all was changed. I had hoped to escape from the wearisomeness of politics, and I could not have found my way to a worse place. The salon of Madame de Lavernay had become a branch office of the King's council. Domestic and foreign policy was there deliberated on. At the moment when I was shown in they were gravely discussing, amid a noisy conflict of contrary opinions, M. de Mazarin's chances of succeeding the Cardinal in the government of the state. I saw at once that I had put my head in a wasps'-nest. But I put a good face on it and went straight up to Madame de Lavernay. She offered me her hand in a languorous fashion, and even pressed it a little, if I am not mistaken. She offered me a seat, which I accepted; and, with a friendly gesture, she invited me to take my place in the small and privileged group which she had summoned to her side by special favour. Naturally one man occupied the chief place in the assembly, and it was easy to guess, for as much was plainly written on his face, that he was the titular lover, or, as we used to say then, the champion of Madame de Lavernay. Who would have believed it? My successor was no other than the little Marquis de Croixville, once spurned, now

triumphant. I admit that I felt no jealousy, and even experienced a secret sentiment of generous pity for him. . . . I was sorry for him. . . . How ungrateful men are, and how soon they forget what no interest makes them remember!

The company did not remain later than about nine o'clock. Then, after a number of discussions had been commenced but not finished, and after a brilliant firework display of advocacy for and against the chances of the future minister, the guests began to disperse. Some already saw Mazarin the King's favourite; others gave that title to someone else; the Marquis de Croixville and Madame de Lavernay had eyes for no one but themselves, and I alone saw all that was to be seen. It must be understood that I was serving my apprenticeship in observation. It is a science that has its grades, and a man must be of many years' standing in life before he can flatter himself that he has merited and won his complete graduation. And yet, mere scholar as I was, I surprised a stolen glance and secret pressure of the hand which told me a great deal about the purpose of the two lovers. I made a pretence of commencing a fresh philippic about candidates for the succession to the Cardinal's place; and under cover of this noisy diversion, to which I prudently lent only one ear, I quite distinctly heard with the other, which was on the alert, the sprightly Lavernay give the marquis a rendezvous at her house at midnight.

“Egad,” thought I, “travellers have some claims, and I am very much mistaken or I am in the best possible position to demand the benefits of the laws of hospitality. Besides, the hostess whose favours I have to claim cannot treat me quite as a stranger, and though I am a humble bird of passage, the man who has replaced me must suffer a little wrong to my advantage. If that annoys him, he has a scurvy disposition. So it's decided; I will let all these people leave, and I shall stay.”

All the people did leave, and I remained. Innocent that I was, thrice innocent, I thought—and this avowal will cover me with ridicule in the eyes of all who know a little of life—I thought it impossible that Madame de Lavernay should not have preserved at least one of those posthumous likings for me—even if her passion for my person were extinct—which can still make the coldest heart beat after the death of an amour. A sentimental woman may have such a charming return upon herself, but a thorough coquette never. Is it likely she has the time to trouble herself about such trifles? For her the past is the past, the future matters very little, and the present is everything. Never speak to her of memories; does she herself recollect? Never speak to her of dreaming about old ties . . . dreaming! That means so much stolen from her sleep; and when you have

subtracted the hours she consecrates to her toilette, to the world, to scandal, the mass, and her lover, there is only a tiny slice of the night left for repose and the renewing of her fresh complexion.

Well, Madame de Lavernay was such a coquette as I have seldom met in the course of my amorous campaigns. Her character was a masterpiece, on a small scale, of indifference, ingratitude and frivolity; her passions lasted a week, her devotion an hour, her despair a minute—at the most. If our intimacy had lasted longer than I ought to have expected, no doubt the reason was that at that time she felt the need of a little quiet, and it was reckoned as a year of retirement. But I will do her justice; if she did not love for long, she loved a great deal at the time, and expended more energy on her passion in a single day than many another in six months. And she had an immense advantage over many of her rivals in really imagining that she felt the love to which she pretended, and in making the interested persons believe the same thing. Was not that an admirable trait of her nature? To make people believe in their happiness is to make them happy.

Madame de Lavernay at this time thought that she loved the little marquis, and no doubt she no longer remembered that she had formerly regarded him as a dumpy, disagreeable and importunate person. Those had been outbursts of rather crude

candour, of the kind one does not accept even in one's own mind. The first words we exchanged assured me that poor Gaston was very far from her thoughts, and that, as she had formerly sacrificed Croixville to Roquelaure, she was now quite ready to sacrifice Roquelaure to Croixville—the simple baron to the marquis who had succeeded him in her preference. She was visibly embarrassed, there was no frankness in her smile, and I clearly read in her eyes that she would have been delighted to know that I was far enough away. Half for the sport of the thing and half in order to take the measure of my power, I took no notice. We had plenty of time before us, and Madame de Lavernay played her part so charmingly at first that I was tempted to be generous and leave Croixville in peaceable possession of his property; but such ideas have little weight with the hearts of the young. Love, they say, is king of the world; but what they do not say, though it is truer by a great deal, is that desires are little subordinate tyrants who make free to usurp the supposed sovereignty. An unreasonable bent at the moment, a frivolous caprice, perhaps a slight memory of the past, made me turn my back on that wise resolve, and I stayed.

I had no reason to complain. Madame de Lavernay used her best endeavours to be amiable: a sad, ungrateful task! I felt sorry for her, and yet in my heart I enjoyed her discomfort and embarrassment. She wished to reopen the subject of politics,

and the question of Anne of Austria's regency, the Princes' intrigues, the talk of the malcontents, and the pretensions of Mazarin seemed already to loom on the horizon. As I was at an age which feels indifference about these tedious topics, I was very little affected by her attempts, and allowed a scanty success to tactics whose one aim was to put me off my object without my remarking what was in process. Madame de Lavernay was an expert in gallantry, and she was as quick of scent as the quarry that gets wind of the huntsman. She saw what I intended, and prepared to receive the attack in such wise that all the merit of resistance and honours of war should be with her. I saw very plainly that she guessed my plan, but this did not prevent me from carrying the adventure to an end to see what would come of it. Besides, I was extremely anxious to show her that I had profited by what she had taught me. So I tried to recommence, piece for piece, the scene which the reader has hardly had time to forget.

I commenced the assault. But, O surprise! O unfathomed deeps of the heart's secrets! O instability of feminine likings! . . . Madame de Lavernay was insensible to my advances, and did not even seem to understand what I wished to convey to her. Upon every word and gesture that I thought I might risk, she fell into a singular amazement, and her accesses of innocence were such as could only have been tolerated in a school-girl of fifteen. This

piece of well-played comedy taught me a truth which my experience has since confirmed, to wit, that nothing so much resembles an innocent as a first-class *rouée*. Madame de Lavernay carried the game so far that for an instant it deceived me. But that effect did not last. She abashed me in the very middle of my attack by a gesture full of dignity. I stood confounded, out of countenance, and feeling very sheepish at so unexpected a discomfiture. Note the progress I had made ; I insisted no further ; my pride won the day. I concealed as well as I could the very thorough vexation which I found myself forced to drink to the dregs, and now only thought of beating an honourable retreat—that is to say, I would not retire till I had made her understand that I was neither the victim of her affectations of innocence nor of her pretence of virtue. So I resolved to invent an assignation to clearly show her that I was not dancing after her, and that after all I had no so pressing need of her kindnesses.

“ I leave you with regret,” said I, as I impressed a trivial kiss upon her still plump hand ; “ but you, *belle dame*, should know as well as anyone the value of punctuality to those who are deeply concerned about each other. To-night I have an appointment that I would not miss for all the wealth in the world, and time compels me to close a visit which has charmed me so deeply.”

Thereupon I bade her farewell. I know not if

she were annoyed by the slight air I had of indifference and raillery, but she detained me while she answered, with a little grimace of reproach:

“How! . . . Already?”

“You know well, madam, that there is an hour dedicated by Fate to crime and love, to the wildest pleasures and the darkest plans . . . midnight! Well, at midnight I must be near the Châtelet.”

“The Châtelet—or somewhere else,” she said, interrupting me. “I wager that you are going to Madame de Guéménée?”

“Whether to her or to another, madam, it would be profitless to tell you; for if I had not this appointment I should nevertheless consider it a duty to leave you alone a little before that hour. We all have our own affairs, and even you . . .”

“What do you mean by that, Monsieur Gaston, and of whom are you speaking?”

“I never mean more than I say, and you would be wrong in thinking I made the slightest or faintest allusion. And after all, why should anyone be surprised, dear Madame de Lavernay, if you are afraid at night and need a guardian to watch over you? In such a case, one takes whom one can—necessity’s laws are sometimes cruel—and although Croixville is a little *dumpy fellow* with an *air of prosperity* and a *fresh face like a parish beadle’s* that you utterly dislike . . . it is none the less true . . .”

“Indeed you make me wonder, Monsieur de

Roquelaure," cried Madame de Lavernay, with a smile that strove to be gay, or, at the least, indifferent; "how comes Monsieur de Croixville's name to be concerned in this? What have we to do with one another? Do I trouble about him?"

"If not, you are scarcely generous, for I wager that he troubles vastly about you, and that he keeps looking at his watch and counting the minutes. You hide your feelings to perfection, but you are as impatient as he."

"I should be glad to know, Monsieur le Baron, by what right . . ."

"You opportunely remind me, madam, that I no longer possess the right, and that I am even guilty of having abandoned it in a rather cavalier fashion in former times. So forgive me for my indiscretion, and be assured that no man in the world values you so justly as myself. Adieu, madam, adieu!"

"Mercy, how discreet you have become!" cried Madame de Lavernay, maintaining the light tone of raillery she had assumed. "May I die if it does not sound like the preacher in ordinary to his Majesty, preaching on a point of morals at the Chapel of St. Germain. Why follow such a whim, *mon cher Roquelaure*? Although we are governed by the surplice at present, and are threatened with falling out of the hands of one cardinal into those of another, tedious morals are no longer in the fashion . . ."

"And you make a point of following all the fashions."

"It is a sacrifice to custom."

"I think you do not find it very hard."

"Nay, that is unkind. But one can scarcely recognise you; I have never seen you so severe as to-day."

"And I have never seen you such a thorough coquette."

"Is coquetry so great an evil?"

"I used that word for politeness' sake; if I had said all I think . . ."

"What *would* you have said?"

"What you know as well as I. But I think we have already said good-bye . . . time presses, the Châtelet is some way off, and I am anxious about my appointment. Pray pardon me for quitting your society so brusquely, *but*——"

I tried to put into the word "but" all the meaning of which the circumstances rendered it capable, and I took my leave of Madame de Lavernay with a triumphant air, though I was exceedingly annoyed in reality.

I do not know whether she was deceived by my apparent calm; but I was in fact utterly mortified. Her profound indifference, the coldness which she had not even taken pains to conceal, produced the effect of insulting defiance. To be rejected by a woman to whom I had desired, out of politeness,

to return the advances she had formerly made to me—this was shameful! And, in spite of it all, I retreated in the most pitiful and humiliating manner. My mind rebelled, and cried aloud for vengeance; but the fact remained that I had left the ground thoroughly and handsomely beaten.

As love was in default, I called to my aid all the divinities of Olympus, hoping that one or other of them would deign to restore me after my fall. It is always well to hope, and here is a proof of the fact :

I had scarcely walked forty paces down the street when I perceived the Marquis de Croixville, arrayed in the style of a hero of the night, coming towards me with the swinging gait of a man thoroughly pleased with himself. The Spanish cloak was fashionable for romantic expeditions, and nothing would have induced Croixville to disregard a custom which displayed him as a perfect man of fashion and valiant cavalier to all that came within a mile of him. I recognised him perfectly under the dark folds of his mantle. Besides, he was one of those men that have a characteristic gait which it is not possible to mistake. With his short and ill-set figure, he really resembled a barrel with legs set on it.

The sight of Croixville suggested a diabolic device to me. Was I to be at that moment one of the most vexed gentlemen in the kingdom and he

to be on the road to bliss ! Was I to go and shiver at some wretched inn, and try to kill time through the night, while he was on his way to a comfortable chamber where he would certainly find a good fire ? No ! "It cannot be thus, dear Croixville," thought I. "Roquelaure will not mildly acquiesce in playing so ridiculous a part. Madame de Lavernay has become as cold as ice, and plays him the worst trick in the world. Her negligence of him amounts to impertinence, and she sends him about his business, she shows him to the door, like somebody not wanted. It is decidedly necessary that Roquelaure's revenge should light on somebody, and it shall light on you, little marquis."

He was coming, as I said, strutting and humming, when I stopped him by a single word in the midst of his amorous preoccupation. The word was simply his name, which I let him have without preface, and which so surprised him that he stood astounded and actually, 'fore Gad, put his hand on the hilt of his sword. But he soon recognised me ; the play of his face showed his annoyance, but he extended his hand to me, and I shook it heartily, hoping that this would give him a high idea of my sentiments for him and put him in a mood more suitable for the execution of my plan.

"Do you know, my dear Croixville," said I, laughing, "that your attire suggests gallantry, that the hour is suspicious, and that our meeting is an

odd thing! Where the deuce are you going in this array? Certainly you are not going home, for you live in the Rue Royale, and this, you will agree, would be a long way round. But what a fool am I to put such a question to you . . . you are longed for . . . your coming is impatiently expected. I was wrong to detain you; bear me no ill-will for it, and good luck. I know where you are going. She'll be delighted to see you; *I* promise you that. Adieu, my dear marquis, adieu."

Croixville was piqued when he perceived I was so conversant with his business, and, not knowing whether it were some magic on my part or indiscretion in his lady, he wished to push the explanation further, and answered, while he grasped my arm:

"Where do you suppose I am going, then?"

"Not to see anyone who wishes you ill."

"Well, you are wrong."

"Can it be an affair of honour?" said I with comical solemnity. "Midnight! An original time to have chosen, certainly. . . . But after all, you will have the full moon, I think, and if you take me as second, I shall be there to see how it goes. Will that suit you? Anyhow, I won't leave you."

"This devil of a Roquelaure," said Croixville, with a laugh which was anything but merry, "always joking, always full of his fun."

"I am not joking," I answered, "and I swear

I am quite at your service; and since your lucky star has neither the delights of a night of love nor the honour of an original encounter in reserve for you to-night, you will prove that what you have told me is true by granting me a few minutes; I think I shall make you pass them in the best and most agreeable manner. You are not awaited by a mistress desirous to clasp you in her arms, nor by a foe impatient to run his sword through your body, so I may take you with me—and that is what I will do."

"Allow me . . ."

"You have no good excuse to offer. You are mine by fair right, and I take possession of you . . . otherwise I shall think you have been making a fool of me, and I shall take that as a personal affront."

"You are a strange fellow."

"I am as I am. Besides, it is not a great favour that I ask; no other than your helping me to empty a bottle of Spanish wine close by here, near the passage, at Marinelli's . . . he's a rogue of an Italian who buys excellent Catalan wines, and he has a fine bill outstanding against me already. It is a long time since I paid him anything; so it is as well I should go there from time to time to keep up my credit with him—the only way to keep him quiet for awhile."

I grasped Croixville by the arm, and when

once he was in my vigorous grip he did not think of resisting. We were at Marinelli's in no time. Croixville was fond of his stomach—I had noticed as much on the occasion of our famous supper of Provence nougat—and I had little difficulty in making him drink rather more than was good for him. He emptied his glasses of Spanish wine with such a wonderful alacrity that in less than half an hour he had started to chatter like a magpie, and was loudly boasting of the very thing that he had taken every pains to conceal just before. He admitted his assignation with Madame de Lavernay, and, growing more expansive as he emptied a second bottle, he went so far as to ask me—as a matter that concerned his conscience—whether all the rumours that had been prevalent about me and Madame de Lavernay had any foundation. I had not thought till then that anyone on earth could have entertained a doubt on the subject; but Croixville was in love, and the race of lovers is, as is well known, essentially doubtful about what is disagreeable and credulous about what is agreeable. I was unwilling to deprive the poor fellow of so sweet an illusion, and being of opinion that it is allowable to lie in order to perform a doubly charitable action, I declared I had never touched Madame de Lavernay's finger-tips, that it was quite the contrary, the cruel beauty having overwhelmed me with severity. My worthy marquis

was beside himself with joy at that assurance, and his joy displayed itself in fresh and copious libations.

I had not the same reasons to rejoice, and I kept cool, only taking care that he should drink his fill. He was unsteady as it was, I saw he could hardly keep his eyes open, he was not master of his tongue, and his speech was thick. I raised the bottle. He drew back. The movement was prompt, and, so to say, involuntary, and in it was discernible the drunkard's last glimmer of reflection, when, on the point of succumbing, he is enlightened by a feeble flash that brings him to himself for an instant and makes him understand his condition.

"What!" said I. "You give up?"

"I—give up," he said, stammering his answer as he could, "I—never! But it is close on midnight, and punctuality . . ."

"Croixville, you shall not go without accounting for what is left in the bottle."

"My dear Roquelaure, let me shake hands with you."

"We will shake hands later on. Now I give you a challenge that you are bound to accept. There is still enough for two glasses full. Let us see which of us will drink his up without drawing breath."

"Egad, *mon bon*, if that is all you want to satisfy you, that isn't very difficult . . . pour out, and look at me."

Here Croixville began to address me in the second person singular. He was thoroughly drunk. The redoubtable Catalan wine took a terrible effect. Scarcely was the last drop down his throat when he slid softly under the table and began to snore forthwith.

There was one of my victims, stretched at my feet and unable for long enough to disturb my plans. I had to finish with the other, who no doubt was waiting at home, with her eyes fixed on the clock—awaiting the sweet hour that should bring her swain. Well, the swain was destined not to come, and that because he was in no condition to. I asked for pen, ink and paper, and I wrote the following letter to Madame de Lavernay:

You scorned me, and I had to avenge myself at any cost. I am avenged. Phyllis, you will pass this night on a sad and solitary couch. Your sighs will be wasted on the empty air, and your eyes, heavy with troubled sleep, will behold phantoms in the midst of a fearful nightmare; yet I defy these to appear as ugly as the Marquis de Croixville when he has drunk too much.

Adieu, Phyllis, may the lesson be of use to you. As for me, I bear you no more ill-will. I have found a pastime, in making your dear marquis drunk, which outvies the joy I should have felt in taking his place by your side. The poor fellow loves you to desperation, but were I in your place I should be jealous of Catalan wine, and I should rebuke my Amadis for sacrificing his heart to his stomach. You will do as you please about that. I have preserved the closest secrecy as to what

passed between you and me. Roquelaure takes no shameful vengeance. All he wished was to make you pass a sleepless night. In that he has succeeded. Blessed be the wine of Spain.—Adieu.

I dispatched this letter at once, and I learned from the bearer that it had been duly delivered. Thereupon I slipped out of Marinelli's without explaining matters to mine host. Croixville did not wake till the following morning; he paid for the wine, and hurried to his assignation. I know not how the fair lady received him, but it is certain that there ensued an estrangement between them which lasted several days. I had not aimed at that, for I have never taken pleasure in causing unhappiness to anyone. As for Madame de Lavernay, whom I met several times at the house of Madame de Guéménée, she treated me distantly for more than a year. Happily I had more than one little affair elsewhere, as will appear by the following chapters.

CHAPTER VI

A survey of the year 1643—The floods—An evening at Du Ryer's—Madame C.—The story of M. and Madame Charmontel—The councillor of the Parlement of Rennes—The end of the honeymoon—The husband's extreme coldness—The revival of the lady's sentiments—The attempts—Tears—Coquetry—Trying faithlessness—The Comte de Chamblard—*In flagrante delicto*—Charmontel not to be moved—M. and Madame Biassou—The innocent Abbé Guibert—A surprise—The admirable composure of a grammarian—A lesson in grammar.

THE commencement of the spring of this year was chiefly occupied by two events, of a very different nature, which formed the subject of conversation in every circle of Paris, though not in the same proportion. I mean the battle of Rocroy, at which, to my great regret, I was not present—the encounter that covered the name of M. le Duc d'Enghien with such unsullied glory. The Spaniards had never undergone so sharp a reverse, and it is a fact that they have a sore memory of it. The other event, in which man's intervention played no part, and which might be regarded as a scourge from Providence, was a series of floods, which wrought such terrible ravages at many points at once that public prayers were everywhere enjoined

by the bishops. The rising of the waters was so formidable at Brussels that the canal leading to Antwerp inundated almost the whole of the lower part of the town. The Meuse also was swollen to such an extent that the flood swept away four bridges in the town of Liège.

One night we were at Du Ryer's, where a circle of people known for their learning or their wit often met, and the conversation stuck so upon this inexhaustible theme of floods and submerged villages and drowned wretches, that Madame C—— complained of the too depressing turn the evening was taking, and offered to introduce a welcome diversion by telling us about M. and Madame de Charmontel—a story which, if she were to be believed, was really worth listening to. We had all known Mademoiselle de Bonneuil, a charming creature, only daughter of the Seneschal de Saumur's wife, who had been married about a year to Charmontel, a councillor of the Parlement of Rennes. We accepted Madame de C——'s offer with one voice; she was not a woman who made difficulties, and she commenced forthwith:

“You all saw the charming Célestine de Bonneuil when she returned to live with her mother at Saumur after leaving school. It is not more than two years ago at the most, and I assure you she turned out as well as she promised. She has a tall, shapely, graceful figure; her appearance is as

taking as possible. Her hair is of the softest tinted gold, her complexion very clear, her eyes beautiful and finely designed, and her eyebrows form an arch better than the greatest painter in the world could make one. You know that in her case one charm hides another, and it is a pity her mouth should be so small, for it makes her sweet and fresh lips hide her teeth—the most delicious row of pearls that a connoisseur could dream of possessing. Her voice has an angelic sweetness, and you will recall that her manner of conversation is charming, and she has a noble and distinguished carriage which gives her the air of a princess.

“Well, in Célestine the fair body is matched with a soul graced by noble and generous sentiments. In her marriage she would follow only the dictates of her heart, and she married Charmontel—for love.”

At this a scarcely perceptible grimace passed over everybody's face. Madame C—— noticed it, and continued :

“That surprises you, and I understand why it does so. Charmontel is as cold, stiff and prosaic as Célestine de Bonneuil is ardent, impetuous and imaginative. But I must tell you that when Charmontel paid his court to Mademoiselle de Bonneuil, he so cleverly disguised his character that he deceived Mademoiselle de Scudéry herself, and she once thought of making this solemn

councillor the sentimental hero of one of her excellent novels. He made such a good pretence of passion that Célestine fell madly in love with him. The marriage was arranged in no time. There was no serious difficulty about settlements or interests, for everything had been cut and dried beforehand, and during more than a week Saumur was gay with the wedding entertainments and the music of the fiddles. Monsieur and Madame de Charmontel left for Rennes immediately, and when they got there the adventure began to get lively.

"The consummation of the marriage had not in the least chilled Célestine's ardour; but it would seem that matters were otherwise with worthy Master Charmontel. You might have supposed that the fifty thousand crowns which accrued to him by way of her dowry had had the effect of a wet blanket on him, for on the third day he told his wife that they were to sleep apart, and his conduct towards her, on Célestine's own showing, was such as could barely be forgiven to a husband after twenty years of wedded existence.

"You understand, *mes amis*, that poor Made-moiselle de Bonneuil's dreams were not fulfilled by this. Perhaps another woman in her place would have played the virago, posed as a victim to her family, and taken official steps against the ungrateful Celadon.

"But Madame de Charmontel was high-minded,

and would have none of those little compromises that only palliate the evil, and are naturally repugnant to a conscience so irreproachable as hers. She resolved to bring Charmontel to her feet again by the power of love alone."

Du Ryer looked up as if he wished to say something. Madame de C——, who disliked to be interrupted, addressed him with some impatience:

"My good poet, when you are making your tragedies, devise the endings of them—nothing can be better than that; but let us make our endings as we choose. And this one is matter of history, and all your fancies cannot change it in the least."

Du Ryer nodded his head to show he acquiesced in Madame C——'s wishes, and she resumed as follows:

"So there was our poor Célestine seeking a good means to soften Charmontel's heart, or rather to draw him from that state of seeming lethargy of which many wives would freely have availed themselves in the interests of their liberty.

"She began with reproaches—you know the kind—as sweet as honey, and touching as the lark's song. Charmontel only answered in self-defence, and alleged that the Parlement imposed too much business on him to leave him leisure for thinking much of anything else. The bad qualities of the Bretons carried off this bad piece of pleading, and Madame

went away in an ill humour and Monsieur went out to his law-court.

“Madame de Charmontel was not a woman to give up at the first rebuff. She had in the highest degree the obstinacy which accompanies love, and she flattered herself she could conquer her opponent by pity. So she neglected to hide the pallor of her cheeks under a film of rouge, and let her husband see her as often as she could under the full sway of her grief. At breakfast, at dinner, during the short walks they took on the public promenade, there were heartbreaking sighs, sombre allusions without end, obstinate silences which must have brought guilt home to the least talkative man. Matters came to such a pitch that everybody in Rennes observed Célestine’s extreme melancholy—everyone, that is, except Charmontel. He spoke to her one day about the matter, saying with the greatest composure :

“‘You do not look very bright, madam; you would do well to attend to your headache, or your state of health will certainly become serious.’

“After that endeavour came another. Célestine meant to be loved at any cost, and she had heard that coquetry is sometimes a terrible provocative. All the best houses in Rennes were open to her, and Charmontel made no difficulty about taking her to them. Célestine became the queen of coquettes in the place. She encouraged nobody, but provoked

everybody, and soon had an incredible following of aspirants and adorers. It might be said of Célestine that she carried coquettish innocence to a scandalous point. One night, however, at a ball given by M. de Lagneau, a wealthy comptroller, she seemed to accord marked preference to a certain Comte de Chamblard, the son of a worthy gentleman of Berry who had followed the wars under Henri IV. There was rout and confusion among the competitors. From luckless swains they all at once became purveyors of scandal, and joined in attacking the poor lady's reputation for the simple reason that they had not succeeded in their assault on her virtue. For that matter, Charmontel seemed to take great concern at this event at the ball. He never took his eyes off Chamblard, and you would have sworn he was keeping count of the continual encouragements Célestine seemed to give by constantly choosing him for her partner. There was even an unaccustomed fire in his eyes, and everything was going well. At last it was time to go home, and Charmontel accompanied his wife as far as her dressing-room. Célestine expected an explosion, but no explosion took place. The icy husband merely remarked:

“‘What an admirable entertainment, madam, and what a distinction for me that you were the queen of it! You were charming indeed.’

“‘Ah, you thought me pretty?’

“‘Yes, indeed, and I saw that all the other ladies resented it thoroughly. As for the men, they were all eclipsed by the Comte de Chamblard. . . . Now that man is really a gentleman of the best style . . .’

“‘Perhaps you think,’ stammered Madame de Charmontel, ‘perhaps you did not approve of my choosing this young man so often . . . but really . . .’

“‘He excelled the others? You are quite right, *ma chère amie*, and, in your place, I should have done the same. But it is very late, and you must be sleepy. Adieu.’

“And after *tenderly* kissing—Célestine’s forehead, Charmontel went quietly to bed.

“The poor girl passed a horrible night. He was snow, he was ice, he was hoar-frost! Surely he was bewitched; and Célestine, seeing the outline of her white neck and the graceful contour of her comely bosom reflected in the mirror, at first persuaded herself that he was under the influence of some malignant spell. But she soon reverted to more reasonable thoughts, and concluded that there was but one very natural reason for it all, simply that her husband did not love her.

“Now for other women,” remarked Madame C—— sagaciously, “this fine discovery would not have mattered a rap. Men’s love is certainly no such scarce thing that one need be so seriously troubled about it. But Célestine has an exceptional

character, she has her own ideas, and requires her own particular satisfactions. It made her ill for four-and-twenty hours.

“Two days later—can you believe it?—my poor friend seriously contemplated killing herself. She was disgusted with life, and it is a fact that she passed a good part of the day dipping into a big medical work in the hope of finding some rapid and sure means, not more terrifying than need be, of destroying herself. Happily she had been brought up in a very piously conducted convent, and her religious convictions made her abandon the plan.

“But what was she to do? It was as well to die as to live in despair. Her reflections had carried her to this point when the Comte de Chamblard was announced. She ordered he should be shown up.

“The Count was about thirty-one. His attire was dazzling. His ruffle was of the most wonderful lace, and his satin breeches had such a lustre of newness that Bassompierre himself would have envied them. His cuffs were of the most exquisite point lace, and his whole person exhaled a perfume which would have made all the daintiest little women in Paris faint with ecstasy. Imagine the effect he was likely to produce upon the wife of a councillor of the Parlement de Rennes. Our country lady almost experienced embarrassment, and felt ill at ease in the presence of so perfect a cavalier.

"You see how the land lay. Chamblard had been so encouraged by Célestine at the Comptroller's ball that he thought she was madly in love with him. He wanted to take advantage of this stroke of luck, for though he perhaps attached no great importance to it, yet it would not mar a list that was pretty well composed, and in any case it would swell the numbers. So he began his rôle of gallant at once.

"A few days earlier Célestine would have received him with such an air as would have crushed any wish in him to return. But now it was very different. 'My husband,' she thought, 'could not well take umbrage on the count of thirty or forty suitors, but a single one will make him far more anxious. I shall pretend to give ear to Chamblard.'

"Now, as Chamblard is something of a fop, she had little trouble in making him believe he was much to her liking. The right good-will he put into his suit aided her plan particularly well. He let no day go by without coming to see her, and she beguiled him with vague promises and words that can be taken in two ways but bind no one to anything, and only showed herself exacting as to attentiveness. So Charmontel never came home but he found Chamblard in the house.

"Now for the result of this comedy. Do you suppose the husband was so good as to get angry at last? Did he at least show suspicion? Very

much of it! Instead of detesting the Comte de Chamblard, Charmontel expressed a lively friendship for him. Célestine asked him to come as often as possible; but Charmontel did more—he pressed him to stop to dinner every day.

“There was nothing for it. Charmontel was blind because he would not see, and I think those are the only incurable cases of blindness. Then Célestine understood that she could do nothing but acquire resignation, and she was already putting abundant zeal into that line of conduct, when she perceived that the Count’s homage gave her a certain amount of pleasure. This was inevitable. One cannot put one’s finger in the fire without burning it, and Célestine’s inflammable nature was not proof against the dangerous association. As she was a mere tyro, she soon saw that she would find it very difficult to get out of the scrape. The art of coquetry requires especial study, and, as a general theory, it is not everyone who would be a coquette that succeeds in being one. Madame de Charmontel was enmeshed in her own net. She had chosen to play at a game in which Chamblard was much more skilled than she, and it was unquestionable that she would lose the game.

“However, she kept up her illusions. She still believed in innocent playfulness and in amours without blame or blemish. A woman must be very young to have such notions, and in fact Célestine

was not twenty-three. However it might be, one day when Charmontel had gone three leagues out of Rennes to be present at the examination of a clodhopper who had once made one of the Nu-Pieds gang, the Comte de Chamblard became more assiduous and enterprising than ever. Célestine put her dignity in her pocket, and did all that a human being could to quiet him. But neither tears nor threats availed. Chamblard persisted in pushing his point, and I ought to say that at a crisis he has the devil's eloquence. She had just decided on quitting him when the sound of a horse's hoofs was audible in the court. Beyond all doubt it was her husband. All of a sudden she was seized by a strange inspiration. A wave of affection mounted to her head, not for Chamblard (she thought no more of him than if he had not been there), but for Charmontel. The oddest reflections hurried through her mind, and the thought which came to her was in reality so true and apt to the situation that it gave her a terrible power. Since Charmontel outraged her each day by his coldness, since she could not touch him by her tears, nor bring him to her feet by her sadness, nor stimulate him by her coquetry—since he resisted every attempt, she would make one last and fearful endeavour. And then her action became one that sprang rather from curiosity than from amorous excitement. She wanted to know if anything in the world, no matter what, had the power to move that

man from his incredible indifference. So she would risk the upshot. 'If he cries out,' she thought, 'I shall understand him; if he makes complaint to me, I shall know that he has at least one fine fibre in his heart; if he kills me, so much the better.' She would be only too glad to hasten the end of a life that wearied her. Chamblard, lover though he was, had not altogether lost his head, and looked nervously towards the window when he heard the noise of the horse. He would have been glad to go. But one moment, *cher Comte*—you must be happy . . . against your will! For retreat is impossible. Célestine, in the feverish state I have described, detained him with her two fair arms. Now it was his turn to wish to release himself, and her turn to oppose him. And she reassured him by declaring that her husband could not return before the evening. And Chamblard, upon my honour, was quite right in thinking that she was at least as interested as he in exercising prudence, and troubled himself no more.

"Charmontel appeared at the door. Célestine affected surprise, confusion, terror, and Chamblard drew his rapier and stood at guard.

"What do you suppose that Charmontel did? I see that some of you expect a terrible outburst. Some of you wager that insults passed, others that there was a duel, and others that the two victims were sacrificed. Not one of you, *mes amis*, will

guess what really happened; so I will free you from your dilemma.

"Charmontel just glanced at the unpleasing scene, then he closed the door and went away."

Madame de C——'s story was applauded by all, and the company was unanimous in declaring that very few persons on earth were capable of Charmontel's coolness.

I begged the company's attention amidst the noise of their comments. "Charmontel is a strange husband, I agree," said I, "and his wonderful imperturbability has the oddest effect; but in my childhood I had an instructor in grammar named Antoine Biassou, a worthy fellow who was equal to him, as you may judge for yourselves if you permit me to relate an incident well known throughout Guyenne—as may easily be understood, since Biassou was a native of Lectoure and had there received my father the Marshal's order to teach me the rudiments and guide my first steps in education."

"Tell it, tell it," said they all.

"Biassou," I responded, without further preface, "had a wife who was neither pretty nor plain, neither clever nor stupid, neither fat nor thin—such a woman a young cleric just out of his studies regards as the ideal of his innocent dreams, at fifteen. One is not hard to please at that age, for the vulgar but undeniable reason that appetite

makes one think everything good. Well, Madame Biassou, after all, was not destitute of some real attractions and her manners were very engaging, and in the previous year she had turned a young man's head—his name was Guibert. The affair went forward as smoothly as could be desired, and for long enough our two lovers were in clover. Everybody in Lectoure had suspicions—and some worthy souls, more prone to mischief than charity, even warned Biassou of the rent in his conjugal honour. Biassou was as good as Charmontel. He turned a deaf ear, and was as punctual as ever at his classes. Teaching grammar had become his passion, and all his dreams were of verb, adjective, declension and syntax. One day, however, he came home rather earlier than usual and found Guibert talking with his wife.

“At sight of the husband Guibert grew pale, looked around in a frightened way, and in his confusion, being no longer quite master of himself, said to Madame Biassou :

“‘You see I was right, madam ; it was better for me to go just now.’

“The unlucky woman made no reply to that silly and profitless remark. But Biassou drew up solemnly to the abbé and laid his hand heavily on his arm ; then he exclaimed in a voice of thunder :

“*‘It WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER, ignoramus, it WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER for me to go !’*

"And having allowed himself this satisfaction, well worthy of a provincial grammarian, Biassou led Guibert out of the house without saying another word to him."

"And after that?" they asked me eagerly.

"After that? Nothing happened. The lovers did not meet again, and Biassou seemed to have completely forgotten the scene—there was nothing surprising in that, for he was incredibly absent-minded. But from that time he was more severe than ever about faults in grammar."

"And Madame Biassou?" inquired a small voice among my audience.

"They assure me," I replied to my questioner, the slender Baronne d'Hervieux, "they assure me that, zealous to satisfy her husband, she is now seeking a lover—*who knows grammar.*"

The story of Biassou the grammarian was received with as much favour as that of Charmontel, and I may say that I shared the honours of the evening with Madame C——.

CHAPTER VII

M. de Brancas—His absent-mindedness—The wig—Mademoiselle Garnier—The blessing—Strange disappearance of the husband—Anxiety—The bride's regrets—Sad dreams—Contrast—The little letter—A dainty supper—M. de Barillon—We save Brancas from himself—He returns to his duty—A wedding night—Gomberville—All set right—The Abbé de Mauroy—The stolen spectacles—M. de Lesdiguières—The levée of Anne of Austria—A remark repeated—My connection with Bassompierre—Portrait—The principles of French gallantry—A model to follow—Reflections—M. de Valazé—His imaginary terrors—Other queer characters—M. and Madame Lombard—Cornet Restaud—The husband's jealousy—The lady's simplicity—A grotesque vow made on a death-bed.

ABOUT this time everybody was diverted by a singular mishap that befell M. de Brancas, brother to the Duc de Villars and *chevalier d'honneur* to the Queen-mother. M. de Brancas was extremely absent-minded. He mistook one time of day for another, and the day for the night; there was no limit to his preoccupation. He would spit in the throne-room as if it were a matter of course, and he used to hum in church. It would be impossible to say how many brawls he got himself into by pushing against passers in the streets, and he fought three or four duels for behaving rudely to some of his most intimate friends, whom he had failed to recog-

nise. I saw him once at the *petit lever* at the Palais-Royal with a blue knot of ribbons on his left leg and a yellow knot on his right. It suggested the carnival. On another occasion he went out into the streets carrying a sheath without a sword, and bare-headed. Everyone laughed at his misadventure in the Queen's palace. One night when a ball was given he happened to pass under a chandelier that was hung lower than the others, and left his wig hooked on to it. Everybody laughed and made merry about it, and Brancas himself could not resist joining in their boisterous enjoyment. It was not till a quarter of an hour had passed that he noticed how everybody's eyes were turned upon him, and perceived that he was the chief character in the farce at which he had laughed so heartily.

But that was a trifle compared to his adventure on the day of his marriage. He had been paying court to Mademoiselle Garnier for a long time, and the crowning event of the wedding took place at last. Naturally he collected himself as much as he could for that day; but it appeared that, despite his efforts, he did not collect himself enough, as the following story will show.

The wedded couple had received the bishop's blessing and had gone home to the residence where they were to live accompanied by their intimate friends, when Brancas, alleging some important business, begged leave to quit them for a moment.

It was such a simple matter that no one troubled about it. The bride paid no more attention to it than anybody else, and to kill time the company at first played cards. Then the fiddles were sent for, and they danced a coranto to sharpen their appetites. The coranto is as pretty a dance as I know, and seldom fails to put people at their ease and promote good spirits. And it went so merrily that M. de Brancas, who did not return, was forgotten, while his wife showed as nimble heels as anyone.

However, everything comes to an end, and at length the company noticed that the husband—one of the indispensable actors in the comedy—was not in his place.

“Where is M. de Brancas?” “Who has seen M. de Brancas?” “When will M. de Brancas be back?” everybody asked in a breath.

But there was no answer to all this chorus of questions, and the bride, who could only express surprise, almost began to grow sulky at it. The elder people exclaimed at his impertinence and the unpardonable neglect of the first principles of gallant behaviour. As the deserted fair was pretty enough, the younger sort laughed in their sleeve, reflecting that after all she would not be made a widow by the circumstance, and that the absent husband would have plenty of substitutes.

The evening drew on; not a sign of him. Bed-time, and still no news of him.

After a slight collation, at which the bride's anxiety chilled the company's conviviality—an effect increased by a general uneasiness and preoccupation that everyone will easily imagine—all withdrew discreetly, and left the poor abandoned spouse to go to her room in sadness. To all appearances the wedding-chamber would be little better than a cold and barren desert.

What a prospect for a bride of twelve hours! What a doleful night! What an introduction to the future joys of marriage!

Mademoiselle Garnier—for I dare not as yet give her the title of Madame de Brancas—must surely have made the darkest reflections and have felt disgusted with life.

As for Brancas, he was taking life as philosophically and gaily as possible in the meanwhile, as we shall see. About nine o'clock that evening, Barillon, who had been at the service in the morning, found a brief letter at his house, on which the following words were scribbled in Brancas' handwriting:

CHER AMI,—You know how well I love Mademoiselle Garnier, and you also know how well I love a bachelor's life. As I am to be married to-morrow, and this is my last day of freedom, I mean to employ it as I choose, and I am going to enjoy myself to the top of my bent to-night. I have written to several of our friends. The glasses are ready, the corks are drawn, and I need not tell *you* that wine turns sour if it is kept waiting too long.

Imagine Barillon's amazement. He would as soon have expected to meet the devil in person in his house as to receive such an invitation. He started back at once and hurried to Brancas' old quarters. He was the first to arrive.

There was our fine fellow in the middle of the dining-room, having the table laid for six. The two footmen who were engaged upon the business seemed somewhat puzzled by so unexpected an order, and were asking one another in whispers what the strange whim meant. But in the fulness of their wisdom they had come to the conclusion that very likely M. de Brancas intended to bring his wife to his own place after the festivities that were to be held at her father's, and offer her an appetising supper in the company of a few free-and-easy friends. But these worthy fellows were ignorant of the fact that one of the clauses of the marriage contract presented Brancas on the day of his marriage with a house that belonged to his bride's father, on the condition that he commenced to reside there immediately. The dancing, the repast and the card-playing had been at that house, and the marriage-bed was prepared there.

Scarcely had Barillon arrived at Brancas' when I joined him there.

"Roquelaure! Barillon!" cried our delighted host. "Punctual, both of you. If friendship may be measured by the eagerness with which a cordial

invitation is accepted, you are some of my best friends . . . and I hope—in all good faith and with no ill suggestion—that you will be my wife's friends, too, when I am married."

"His wife's!" said Barillon, looking at me.

"When he is married!" I said, looking at Barillon.

"Well," remarked Brancas, "what is the matter with you? Why do you look at each other in that blank, disconcerted fashion?"

"It is pretty strong," Barillon remarked to me.

"Poor girl!" I exclaimed between my teeth.

"Will you explain? . . . Are you in your senses?" asked our host.

"Listen, Brancas," I rejoined sharply. "A man can only be in his senses when he has senses to be in, and nobody could ask you the question you have just put to us. You ask us if we are in our senses—where are yours? What have you done with them? What bee have you got in your bonnet? If you are not mad already, *mon pauvre Brancas*, you are not far off that state."

"I? What makes you say so?"

"To think of his asking that!" said Barillon, crossing his fingers.

"Is it because I believe in your friendship," continued Brancas, "and have asked you to come and bear me company? Is it because I have taken the idea—an odd one, perhaps—of devoting the day

before my marriage to a bachelor's party? Do you think the table will be ill served, or suppose I shall poison you with Orleans wine? Am I not in my right mind? Do I look as if I had escaped from an asylum? Do I look like a man beside himself?"

"You look like anything," I answered, "except what you really are."

"And what am I, then?"

"Married."

"Married!!"

Brancas said no more. He opened his eyes as wide as they would open, and let his arms fall heavily, and an air of extreme weariness settled over his whole person.

"Married!" he repeated more softly, as if he were trying to decipher some illegible characters in the darkness of the past.

"It is my turn to question you," I said to him at once, in order to take advantage of the working of his mind. "Did not we go together yesterday to Simon the jeweller, who sold us a set of diamonds for your wife? Did not I take you to confession in the evening at St. Germain-des-Près? Have you forgotten between this morning and now the admirable discourse of the abbé who gave you his pious benediction? And yet he told you the finest things in the world."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," stammered

Brancas, who appeared to be awaking from a kind of dream.

"And have you not just led your wife home, and that with her hand lovingly held in yours?"

"Eh?"

"Your wife!"

"Zounds!" cried Brancas, completely aroused, "I remember. I recollect it . . . it is true . . . and I was just going . . . let me see . . . what will this accursed absence of mind lead me into? But tell me, both of you, what has happened. Is it long since I left . . . my wife?"

"About six hours."

"Six hours! What will they think of me?"

"That you must be dead."

"And my wife?"

"That you do not think much of her."

"But that is ruinous."

"It is not hopeful."

"Do you think she will pardon me?"

"A woman's clemency is like a king's: uncertain and inexhaustible at the same time. You can but try."

"What time is it?"

"Eleven."

"I will hurry to the house."

"I advise you to look sharp."

"But where are the guests?"

"At home, and sound asleep, no doubt."

“And my father-in-law?”

“In the middle of the courtyard of his house, listening to the noise of every passing carriage, and hoping that yours will come at last.”

“And my wife.”

“At your home.”

These words had the desired effect on Brancas, and brought him to himself and the recognition of his duties as a husband. He glanced at his clothes, had them put in order by the servants, and hurried out of the house as if the devil were after him. In spite of his haste he just stopped long enough to say to the astounded lackeys:

“I am going out, and shall not return. Serve supper to these gentlemen; they will do the honours of the house in my absence. Adieu, Barillon; adieu, Roquelaure; make my excuses to our friends, and drink like men. Placed between Bacchus and Venus, I very nearly went to the wrong altar. Make abundant libations to the former, while I am beseeching the latter to forgive my mistake.”

And he went out.

“Heaven send he does not lose his way,” said Barillon, “and sleep somewhere else.”

“If he could do that,” I answered, “the Pope ought to unmarry him. Otherwise there would be neither justice nor security for women.”

The rest of the company soon arrived. The

story was told to each of them, and I need not say that they laughed loud at it. The dainty feast prepared by our friend, the king of absent-minded men, aided us to a fine tone of merriment, and we passed the night in amusing ourselves. Gomberville, the author of "Polexandre," got so drunk as to surprise us all, for he was usually as sober as he was peaceable. We begged him to read us a few pages of his "Cythérée," which had not then appeared; he almost always carried sheets of it in manuscript in his pocket. He was willing enough to oblige us, but could not manage it, his head was so heavy and his eye so unsteady. He fell asleep at the third line, and a good thing it was, for if he had carried his obligation further we should have gone to sleep instead of him.

On the following day we learned that Brancas had gone where he was due, and had told his father-in-law some outrageous lie or other, which was fortunately accepted. The worthy fellow even agreed to bear him no ill-will for it, in spite of a persistent cold that he had caught waiting in the open air. As for his wife, it would seem that the reasons he gave her satisfied her completely. The tale went that she made no difficulty about falling in with all his excuses. This rumour was confirmed by what we saw with our own eyes the next evening: she was holding her husband's hand in her own in a way that not only showed she

bore him no grudge, but that he had satisfied her as much as could be wished.

After M. de Brancas, the most absent-minded man in the world was undoubtedly the Abbé de Mauroy, who was almoner to Mademoiselle de Montpensier. On one occasion, going into the country to visit his father, formerly a comptroller, he mistook his room and went to sleep in a serving-maid's bed; fortunately when she got to her room she perceived the mistake in time. However, she was already undressed when the intruder's snoring warned her of her peril. She fled in her chemise, and could think of nothing better than taking the abbé's place in the bed they had prepared for him. The next day Mauroy got up without noticing what he had done, and he would never have heard the tale if other people had not taken care to tell it to him. Another time he was thoroughly primed with important directions which Mademoiselle had given him for the ears of Père la Chaise, and he addressed the abbé throughout as "Your Royal Highness," while, on his return, he gave the princess the title of "Your Reverence." He would often say vespers instead of mass, and mass instead of vespers. He would have made no difficulty about striking up the baptismal psalms at a marriage or a funeral. The adventure he had with the prior of his abbey deserves to figure among the most comical of the kind. The worthy man had

been to see him, and when he left, Mauroy set to work to attend to certain business and read his correspondence. But first and foremost he wanted his spectacles, and he began by overturning all his papers to find them. What a strange thing, the spectacles had disappeared! The Abbé Mauroy exclaimed upon it, swore, put himself in a rage. He even went so far as to call the prior a dishonest fellow; for he alone had been in his room, and therefore he alone could be suspected of misappropriating the spectacles, which were valuable. The whole presbytery was set to work. Every place was ransacked—the chapel, the sacristy, the linen-cupboard, the vestry, and even the cellar; all this energy was bound to yield some result. And the Abbé Mauroy's spectacles were found—on his nose.

By the side of these specimens of an extreme tendency to abstraction one might quote the well-known reply of the savant when a servant ran in and announced that the house was on fire.

"Tell my wife," he replied, while he went on quietly turning over the pages of a book; "you know quite well that I never trouble about household matters."

A few days after the supper that Brancas gave us I went to Grand-Mesnil, where M. de Lesdiguières had established himself in summer quarters. At his house I met Bassompierre. It is well known that

the jealous susceptibility of Richelieu had consigned this gentleman to the Bastille, and that he had been released at the Cardinal's death—a circumstance that evoked from Bassompierre the following remark, which amused people at the time :

“The Cardinal's last offices for me were to get me into prison, and I have got out for the last offices of the Cardinal.”

Imprisonment had not deprived Bassompierre either of his distinguished manners or his ready wit. But he had grown old. Just at this time I happened to be present with him at the Queen's *grand lever*, and I was the hero of a little scene which was also witnessed by MM. de St. Simon, de Grammont, Madame de la Roche-Guyon, two or three abbés, Cardinal Mazarin, and one of the ladies' maids of honour.

Anne of Austria was more gay than usual that day, and among other things that her Majesty graciously communicated to us was her intention to have the Château of Versailles carefully restored, so that it should be made one of the handsomest of the royal residences. And she added that by this means she would have one foot at Versailles and the other at Paris.

“Marie de Médicis,” I observed, bowing, “one day said exactly the same thing about St. Germain-en-Laye. Great queens think alike.”

A quarter of an hour after this incident, Anne of Austria had retired to her private apartments,

and I was about to cross the guard-room when an arm arrested my progress. I turned round. Bassompierre was behind me, and said with a smile :

"I knew you were a man of wit, Monsieur de Roquelaure, but I did not know you flattered. Reminding Queen Anne of Austria of an expression I used to Queen Marie de Médicis was conferring a great obligation on me. If I were a king, I should say you wished to be one of my courtiers."

"Kings may wish for courtiers," I immediately replied. "Bassompierre can only have admirers or friends."

"The latter title I would ask from you," answered the Marshal, with a perfect grace of manner.

And as he finished speaking he pressed my hand affectionately.

Till then Monsieur de Bassompierre and I had no great intimacy. The imprisonment which had kept him from the Court for so many years, and the disproportion of our ages had combined to set a distance between us which neither had hitherto sought to abridge. This incident established a close and genuine friendship between us. Unfortunately it was broken almost as soon as it was formed. About two years after the passage that I have just recounted we carried this famous man to his last home—a man whose name alone sufficed to represent every distinction and every glory. How many

times afterwards. passing by the tomb that contained his honoured dust, I have thought how much wit, elegance and valour were enclosed, under the iron-fastened monumental stones, in the narrow bed in which we had laid him. After so eventful a life, after such brilliant success, such fame as a conqueror, and such dazzling distinction, I can think of nothing more strange and incomprehensible than annihilation.

Bassompierre was, without question, the most accomplished model of what we call in France a gallant man. Few people know how much is required to deserve this title, for it is generally thought that to have a refined, polite, agreeable and insinuating address with women is sufficient, and that properly speaking a man is gallant only in so far as he devotes himself to pleasing the sex and is successful with them. But this opinion is as false as possible, for true gallantry, far from being confined to such narrow limits, includes every sentiment that goes to make a noble spirit and every quality that distinguishes a noble heart.

So it is not sufficient to be well made, to have a quick and keen judgment, and to observe the rules of courtesy. These are indispensable conditions, but a well-bred ease and a certain idleness which can only be found in a man of family has to be joined to them. Bassompierre combined an air of high rank and of familiarity which secured him

everybody's liking. His words and actions had a particular and personal quality which he alone could impress upon speech and conduct, and this personal style used from the first to astonish those who, as *habitués* of the Court, were good judges in such matters. When he rallied anyone he did so with such tact, quickness of perception, and good judgment as could scarcely be believed. He could attack without offending, and sting without wounding. The science of scratching the skin without drawing blood is a valuable one, and Bassompierre was a master of it. When he dwelt upon serious subjects, such as history, the arts, or philosophy, he used the correct terms without affectation, without conceit, and in a tone which seemed to show that he rather meant to remind his hearers of facts than to teach them. In particular he avoided those intolerable airs of learned pedantry which men who know a little more than the ordinary keep clear of with difficulty. No one conferred an obligation with a more perfect manner than he. He never made the recipient of a favour feel the importance of it, and would have been ashamed to vaunt his services.

My readers will easily judge from the esteem in which I held M. de Bossompierre how great was the grief with which I heard of his death. If it be true that the Court is a paradise--and the French Court then deserved the name--it may be said that one of its brightest stars was quenched on that day.

But I have roamed into a digression which has carried me away from the straight course of my story. The name and memory of M. de Bossompierre have been the cause, and I ask forgiveness for my error, if it be one, for the sake of the hero who caused it. I spoke on a former page of the visit which I paid at that time to M. de Lesdiguières at Mesnil. This visit did not last long, and was not very eventful. We shall revert to M. de Lesdiguières later on, and it was at his house that I saw a certain M. de Valazé. I failed to recognise him, though I had in fact met him more than once. He was in the service of M. de Conti at a later time, when he was concerned in the Fronde intrigues, and he was one of the most extraordinary characters that can be conceived. This worthy fellow, who was about forty years of age, had in his youth been sparkish, fresh and plump. It was even said that certain dowagers had lost their heads about him, and that he had been successful with a number of provincial dames, who liked his sanctimonious clerical air and his well filled-out frame.

So I was surprised to see him as a man who was rather thin than otherwise, with a hesitating gait, a preoccupied face, and a forehead that seemed to lower with the most sombre thoughts. I could not believe my eyes, and I asked M. de Lesdiguières several times if this were really M. de Valazé, with whom I had had some trifling acquaintance some

years earlier at the time of my campaign in the Ardennes.

"It is he," said M. de Lesdiguières. "But, poor fellow, he has a malady, or rather a madness, which never leaves him a minute's piece, and this explains, to a certain extent, the general decline that you perceive."

"Madness! What is his mania?"

"Well, the worthy man is convinced of his high deserts and full of his own importance, and he has got it into his head that everybody envies him, that he is surrounded by spies who keep watch upon him, and rivals who pull his character to pieces. He thinks he has innumerable enemies, and all his imaginations are of insidious attacks, gross calumnies, and treacherous slanders directed against him. This dries his blood and makes him sallow. If anyone that is near to him whispers, he thinks his reputation is being attacked; if anyone sighs while looking at him, he suspects them of pitying his behaviour. In a word, he makes himself ill by brooding over what people may say or think of him, and I can assure you that it is the greater madness, because not a soul cares whence he comes, where he goes, what he says, or what he does."

On the following day I had occasion to assure myself of the real existence of this monomania.

I entered upon an argument in form with the worthy Valazé, and I skilfully brought the discus-

sion round to his favourite topic. There was no end to his grievances; his complaints pierced my ears, and were meant to pierce my heart; he gave me a formal diatribe against the malicious, the indiscreet, and the envious.

"I am very rich," he cried, in a passage of heated oratory. "Well, I would give . . . I don't know how much" (he did not fix the sum) "to anyone who would show me a sure means of escaping slanders in every society in which I am received."

"I have one ready and at your service," I replied very seriously, "and I shall ask you nothing for presenting you with it immediately."

"What is the means?"

"What do you want? When you go to a house in all good faith and innocence, you want to prevent any rascal who may be there from taking advantage of your absence to make fun of you and laugh at you."

"That is just it."

"You should always be the first to arrive, my dear sir, and the last to go."

I do not know if he put my advice into execution; he thoroughly agreed with the theory of it, but the practice would have been extremely difficult. As for that, he belonged to a mad family; his brother-in-law, M. de Villoutel, used to sleep by day and sit up all night, and he had an uncle in the Parlement of Bordeaux who asserted that, to

keep his health, a man must only eat every other day.

When I was speaking just now of M. de Bassompierre, I forgot to mention a person whose picture, though of minor importance, deserves a place in the gallery I now have under review. She was no more than a common woman, whose husband was in the Maréchal's service.

Before, as after, his imprisonment in the Bastille the Maréchal's house was always considered one of the most brilliant and best found in France. Among other servants he had a steward called Lombard, whose appearance and character were perfectly fitted to his place. He was as fat as a canon, and of an incredible rapacity. It was believed he had made a considerable hole in his master's fortune, and his fellows treated him as a thief. They were right. Did not M. Conrart of the French Academy say that the two words were synonymous?

But what was most remarkable about Lombard was, undeniably, his wife. She was very nearly forty years old when I knew her; but though the first flower of her youth had faded, she had enough remnants of beauty to escape being condemned to complete isolation or absolute inaction. She gave plenty of trouble to Lombard with all her suitors, and I, for my part, knew one, at least, who was keen in the pursuit of her.

This was a man of twenty-six, well set up, with

square shoulders and a fine bust, who was called Restaud, and had been a cornet in a cavalry company under the orders of M. de Brissac.

The worthy steward did not make old bones. He was seized with a violent pleurisy when he least expected it, and in a few days was on his death-bed. Being at his last gasp, and after receiving the last sacraments, he still retained a lingering jealousy against this Restaud, not that he had detected his intrigue with his wife, but because he was persuaded that she had a secret tender sentiment for him. He desired to take all precautions against his rival before he died, and he pressed Madame Lombard for a formal promise that she would never marry him.

"Be at peace," she said to him. "I feel quite indifferent about Restaud."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure."

"You will never marry him?"

"Never. You may be quite at ease about it."

"But what guarantee shall I have?" persisted the dying man, with obstinacy.

"My oath," said the lady, raising her hand.

"It is not enough."

"What do you want, then?"

"An even more formal assurance. . . . In fact, I would sooner you should marry anybody than go to that vile cornet."

"If that is all you need to re-assure you," replied Madame Lombard, ingenuously, "you may banish your fears. I have promised someone else already."

With how little some people are contented! Lombard died in tranquillity and contentment. He was not hard to please.

CHAPTER VIII

A walk in the Place Royale—Chapelain—D'Alibon: ex-tax-collector—A long yawn—D'Alibon again—My wish about his lady's virtue—A quarrel between the pair—A challenge—An invitation to dinner—Hostile intentions—I am warned in time—The advice given me by Courcelles—I appear upon the scene—I am regarded as a curiosity—My plan of vengeance—A discussion about me—At table—Cross firing—My appetite—Disappointment—Madame de Buysard—Cicero as a preacher—Simplicity—General amazement—My reputation lost—D'Alibon and his friends withdraw to avoid laughing in my face—I am left alone with the lady—Reaction—She begins with indignation and works round to pity—Pity akin to love—The blind down—Consolation—Madame d'Alibon owed me the reparation—A pleasant time—The husband is content—The lady is well pleased—Everyone is satisfied—Madame de Rambouillet—Fresh successes of the Duc d'Enghien—The carp and the pike—Another piece of insolence from 'D'Alibon—I charitably give him a word of advice.

ONE fine summer evening I was walking across the Place Royale when I saw Chapelain talking with a certain D'Alibon, who had formerly been a taxcollector, and had retired from his business with a huge fortune and an extremley lovely wife to boot. I approached them, and after we had exchanged salutations, I moderated my pace to suit theirs, and we walked slowly up and down.

When I said just now that Chapelain and D'Alibon were talking together, I was wrong. D'Alibon had all the talking to himself, for it was one of the characteristic pretensions of this upstart person to engross the conversation. On this occasion he had very little trouble to keep possession of a babblers prerogative, for Chapelain paid no heed whatever to his twaddle and did not trouble to answer him. I am convinced that Chapelain, when he seemed to be giving the closest attention to the ex-tax-collector, was improvising some bit of prose or verse in his own mind.

My arrival somewhat vexed Monsieur d'Alibon. He had no liking for me, and I had trustworthy information that he had, more than once, striven to do me harm at Court, where he was said to have some influence with M. de Conti. It is beyond me to say what had given him his footing with the Prince.

He gradually recovered from the disagreeable emotion he had felt on my appearance, and continued speaking of the topics of the day with incredible assurance, but without pronouncing for either party, for he well knew the instinctive hate I had for the opposition, and he was not really aware what were Chapelain's views. So he chattered inordinately, and yet told us very little, and there was no sign of his ceasing.

Now I was desirous to speak with Chapelain on

my own account, and I had already nudged his elbow two or three times to hint as much; Chapelain looked askance at the worthy D'Alibon, and signed to me to be patient for a few minutes longer. The eager talker, after lightly touching upon various subjects, of which we were already nauseated: as the probable troubles of the realm during the King's minority, Richelieu's death, Mazarin's fine chances—all twice-told tales—this eager talker, I say, began upon a matter of which he knew nothing whatever, but which would give him, he thought, a kind of distinction. He began to speak at hazard of the interior of the Queen's private apartments, though he had certainly never been within them, and about the maids of honour, affecting to know the little secrets they had, when in fact he scarcely knew the ladies by sight.

It was too much for us. Chapelain, noticing some fellow who passed close to the left of us and yawned as if he would put his jaw out while he did so, seized D'Alibon by the arm and, pointing to the gaping passer, said:

"Look, D'Alibon, you have a way of talking too loud!"

"Eh? What do you say?" replied the orator, disconcerted by an attack, of which he very well saw the force.

"Nothing," replied Chapelain; "but I must leave you. Your company is compromising."

And we went off arm in arm.

This same D'Alibon was one of my bitterest enemies. No day passed but he inveighed against me, and yet, when he met me, he did not fail to shake hands with me, and wish me every prosperity.

One day, when he addressed this compliment to me in the indifferent, commonplace manner he always used, I took him by the arm, to prevent him from escaping, and answered :

“ My worthy Monsieur d'Alibon, the keenest wish my mind can form, one that unquestionably will never reach fulfilment, is that your wife's virtue should be at fault, for I think her more charming every day, and she pleases me perfectly.”

With that I left him open-mouthed, and went on my way. Poor D'Alibon was such a dullard, that he hurried to tell his wife of it, and she nearly choked with laughter, at my saying. But gradually the tone changed, and a regular discussion arose between husband and wife about me. D'Alibon, who got into a towering passion, declared I was an ass, and an impudent fellow. The lady, whom I had often seen among the company at Madame d'Humière's, had just the opposite opinion, and asserted I was able to get the better of anyone who tackled me. The quarrel grew till it resulted in a challenge. D'Alibon offered his wife that he would take the judgment of a certain number of connoisseurs ; they were to be invited to a repast at which

I should be present, and here my *savoir faire* was to be tested. Madame d'Alibon thought the idea ridiculous, and I afterwards learned that she tried to dissuade him. But nothing would turn d'Alibon from his project, and he set out immediately in search of men and women who had a reputation for wit, so as to form an areopagus capable of deciding the question without appeal. They agreed that persons should, by preference, be chosen who did not yet know me, so that they could not be supposed to be influenced by their former relations with me.

The invitations were sent out on the day when D'Alibon came to invite me, with every show of politeness, to dine with him. I had, as yet, no hint of this intolerable trap; but I heard of it the following morning, through Courcelles, who came to warn me of the plot and advised me to lay in an ample store of wit for that occasion. I told Courcelles that I should not be found wanting.

When the day came, I dressed myself with care and gave as much finish to my appearance as I could. I so arranged the time, that I should not arrive at D'Alibon's house till all the guests were already there awaiting me. In this way my entrance would have more effect, and my reckoning was right, for as I stepped across the threshold of the *salon*, I saw a score of eyes turned on me like pistol-muzzles.

This formidable battery did not surprise me, and I did not lose my self-possession in the least. I

bowed, and seating myself near Madame d'Alibon I kissed her hand elegantly. But the kiss was not altogether innocent ; my lips left a moist pressure on her soft, white hand, and as I raised my head I had the pleasure of seeing the two most charming cheeks in the world covered with a tender blush.

I know of nothing more droll than the scrupulous attention that is accorded to a person who, rightly or wrongly, is reputed a wag. The round eyes and gaping mouths and the surprised air of the company would avail to congeal within him, all the gifts Heaven had given him, if he wanted to make use of them. Happily, I had no wish to justify my reputation, and instead of affording amusement for these worthy folk, I was fully resolved to be amused by them.

When my eyes had passed all those heads in review, heads that were for me like those of judges for a prisoner, I rose and quietly took my station at the window whence the trees of the Place Royale could be discerned. There I took the air and chevied the flies, taking no more notice of the company behind me, than if I had been fast asleep.

"He seems bemused," said my enemies below their breath.

"He is pre-occupied," said my partisans.

For, at the risk of being accounted overweening, —I can say no less—I had partisans, and I had enemies. And this was an honour which, beyond

question, I shared with the most illustrious savants and the most powerful monarchs of the world.

My eyes were as keen as a lynx's, and my ears as sharp as a cat's. I saw everything, and heard everything, without seeming to do so.

The little contest was continued.

"I tell you he is empty-headed."

"I tell you he is thinking of some smart saying that he will let fly at us presently."

"Can a man amuse himself catching flies?"

"Egad," replied a little ugly dark fellow, who was a great pedant, one whom I was almost vexed to see among my advocates, "egad, sir, what is your idea in presuming to judge anyone on such slight indications? Does not history supply a thousand examples of oddities very like this, and all attaching to great men? Did not Heliogabalus enclose numbers of flies in a gold vase in order that he might tame them? I have heard it said that a certain Harabus, king of Hircania, took his greatest pleasure in trapping moles, and I have read somewhere that Domitian—the famous Domitian—liked nothing so well as rearing cockchafers. Would you have more instances? The Trojans used rats as playthings . . . the Phœnicians . . ."

"Enough! Enough!" said the other speaker, stopping his ears.

"Then wait for stronger proofs before attacking one of the wittiest gentlemen of the Court, a gentle-

man who is in the good graces of Anne of Austria, who is esteemed by M. de Voiture, a friend of the Marshal de Grammont, and a man that the women compete for . . .”

“Oh, oh!” said a small voice, with an accent of doubt, “I think there is much cry and little wool, about that. For my part, I should not like . . .”

I secretly cast a glance at the lady who indulged in so galling an attack, and had the pleasure to see an ugly creature that I had met more than a score of times, when I had visited Mesdames de Lavernay and de Guéménée, though I had never addressed a syllable to her. And here was a sample of that silent malice that these graceless dolls of women feel for a man during a whole lifetime, when being past their prime, they are left forgotten in a corner, to their great disgust, like rusty swords, or old portraits.

Madame d'Alibon replied in a very low tone :

“All that has been said of M. de Roquelaure is not so false, and I personally know of things . . .”

She said no more, and I noticed that she turned her head in my direction. But I persisted in giving no sign.

“Turning his back on us in that way . . . it's rudeness!”

“Let us wait till supper!”

“He has no manners.”

"He will take his revenge then."

"What impertinence in a Court clown, as he is!"

"Ah!" said Madame d'Alibon again, "there you are stepping in the tracks of MM. de Beaufort and de Saint-Simon. They were the first who thought to do him a great mischief, by calling him a clown. But it's a pretty mishap, gentlemen, if this clown is an elegant, witty and gallant man. There is many a dull fellow of my acquaintance, well considered at the Queen's *petit lever*, but very tame when he is alone with the most ordinary woman; these men would gladly be clowns of the same kidney."

The little woman spoke with extreme animation, and her conduct touched my heart. I felt convinced from that moment that, in her, I had a sincere friend, and I even perceived in her eyes a soft and tender fire that suddenly inspired me with a hope which, until then, I had not seriously entertained.

Another pedant, uglier than the first, answered her:

"You hotly defend him, *Madame*, and it may be you are right. That will be tested at dinner. Dinner is the stumbling block of the most redoubtable champions in the fields of eloquence and wit. The man of wit is doubly witty at table, just as the fool is doubly foolish there. Herodotus, Simplicius and Suidas have given us some admirable truths

on the point. Why do we not go to table? I think the time is more than past!

"My husband has gone to see what is causing the delay; but here he is again; put yourself at ease."

D'Alibon, in fact had returned, and said, rubbing his hands with the air of a man who expects to be hugely amused:

"To dinner! ladies and gentlemen, to dinner! I have a Rivesaltes wine that would loose the tongue of a deaf and dumb man. And I have had the dishes spiced in the Italian manner. I hope laughter will attend us. My friends, follow me!"

The crowd eagerly hurried to the dining-room, and Madame d'Alibon pointed out for me the place of honour, on her right. On her left, she put the old pedant who had attacked me. I must not say too much, but perhaps it will be understood why I was not at all displeased at this.

I must confess that the repast was served with taste and splendour. I had a good enough appetite, but I feigned that it was much huger than it was. I refused nothing that was offered me, I replied to all my host's challenges by extending my glass towards him and drinking bumper after bumper. I tried every dish, showing by my gestures and by an expressive pantomime that I found it all excellent. In a word I behaved as a stout fellow, and no one could deny that I was a match for the best

trenchermen of France and Navarre. But do what they would, I uttered no word. I was resolved about it, and the devil himself would not have got a syllable out of me at that time.

When several direct questions had been addressed to me, without my paying heed to them, some began to think I was absorbed in my gluttony, others that I disliked being questioned, but the most part supposed that I was under the sway of some secret and important preoccupation that deadened my faculties for the time.

Bohlmann—this was the name of the pedant who disliked me—flattered himself that he could make me speak by keeping up a general conversation and supporting all the oddest contentions that came into his head. D'Alibon, who thought the idea was not a bad one, answered him with complete self-assurance, but never ceased to look at me from the corners of his eyes.

"My dear D'Alibon," said Bohlmann, burying his sharp teeth in the parson's nose of a fine pheasant, "now that we are speaking of strange things, did you read a certain book by one Burgrave Ernest, that was published in the year of grace 1618, under the title of 'Achilles brought to life again?'"

"No;" replied the master of the house, emptying his glass. "What does Burgrave Ernest say?"

"The most incredible nonsense," said Bohlmann.

He asserts that by the aid of magnetic philosophy, he can forge weapons of such a temper, that the warrior armed with them, will not only attack the foe without fear, but will even arouse terror throughout a whole army!"

"What a tale!" cried all the guests, except me.

"He says he has discovered a water of valour, that will make the most cowardly brave, and that the Emperor Maximilian I, had this secret before him."

"Too absurd!"

"And he says, as regards his Electre-Vulcan-physique (thus he names his panacea), that from this metal, now lost for years and years, were made the Duke of Alba's helmet, Roland's sword, Virgil's mirror, the knife of Albertus the Great, the rapier of . . ."

"No one believes it!" said a whole chorus of voices, already too well wetted by wines of every kind. "Let us talk of something else."

"Willingly!" replied Bohlmann, who was now well launched upon the conversation. "If you like, I will tell you of the shape of the sky, of the vivifying nature of the sun, or of the inert matter of the moon; '*de omni re et quibusdam aliis*,' as Picus Mirandula said. Command me, I am ready! In the meanwhile, help me to one of those delicious cardoons; the sauce with them is divine."

"With pleasure, my dear Bohlmann," said D'Alibon, serving him a well garnished plate of them; my host's face shone with satisfaction, as he compared the inexhaustible facundity of his friend, to my unshaken taciturnity.

"If you should desire it," resumed Bohlmann, "I would give you a discourse on the domestic habits of the Tartar Khan, or the great events of the reign of Elizabeth in England. Or, to avoid so far a flight and to remain in limits more within our scope, would you rather that we should talk of what happened a week ago, in Paris? They say that M. de Gondy is still madly in love with the Princesse de Guéménée; that passion has lasted a long while. The abbé shows a decided wish to be canonized! Ah, by the way of spicy chat, here is a little incident that was reported to me, but I cannot believe it. You know Madame de Buysard?"

"Of course," said D'Alibon.

"A little fair woman," added another.

"Rather past her prime."

"Daughter of a comptroller."

"Niece to Boissat."

"Well?"

"Well, *mes amis*," said Bohlmann, "the good lady has become serious, and religion has so turned her head, that she does not know what she is saying. M. de Lesdiguières asked her—no later than

the evening before last—on what saint she would call at a moment of danger, and she answered :

““On Cicero, for they tell me his *orisons* are the finest and most eloquent in the world, so I think he would plead my cause with God best.’”

The anecdote was received with incredulous laughter.

“You think it improbable !” continued Bohlmann. “But are not truth and improbability twin sisters? Besides, I have witnesses who heard what I have related, and I beg M. de Roquelaure, who was quite close to Madame de Buysard when she made the slip, to say if I speak the truth !”

I had been silent long enough, and the restraint was beginning to make me extremely impatient. I thought the moment had come, to modify my system slightly, and I replied to the breathless savant :

“It is true, sir, that Madame de Buysard said so. But, at the risk of being accounted as simple as she, I must confess I fail to understand the ridicule to which she has been subjected. Why should not the orisons of Cicero, which I have not the advantage of being acquainted with, be as good as those of any preacher of the day? It is a wretched passion when men always seek to depreciate the past in favour of the present. I know not if the Abbé Cicero were catholic or protestant in his time, but there is talent everywhere ; and I,

though I am very orthodox, have heard excellent Huguenot discourses at Charenton."

I went on eating as peaceably and gravely as I could. No words could convey an idea of the surprise I had caused among them all. Perhaps a few thought I was playing a part; but my imperturbable air of good humour soon persuaded them that I had spoken in earnest. Then discreet smiles were exchanged, and signs of mutual intelligence, that it was comical to notice.

"Poor wretch!" these mute dialogues seemed to say. "Was such ignorance ever known? For a man with the reputation of a wit; upon my honour, he's a sad example!"

They even went so far as to whisper. And why, in fact, should they have shown me consideration? A man who mistakes Cicero for a clergyman, is predestined to a martyr's lot, and must not complain when he is flouted.

This incident being over, they tried to lead up to another. D'Alibon, quite reanimated by his first success, was keen about setting a second trap for me.

"Have you travelled, M. de Roquelaure?" he said to me with a little air of alertness, that was a sure sign he was contriving some fresh mischief.

"Well—enough for one of my years!" I answered, without leaving off eating. "I have seen the barren province of Champagne, Picardy and

l'Ile de France. I have a wandering humour, naturally."

"Then you know geography well?"

"I have never been there," I said very gravely. "But I saw it from the sea, and left it on my right. I hope to return there one of these days."

I once more heard the muffled murmur of a hilarity that each member of the company did his best to dissemble. I was unmoved, a circumstance that contributed not a little to confirm my tormentors in the assurance of their triumph. At last, unable further to repress the impulses of excessive mirth, that were still further stimulated by the constraint they put upon themselves, and on the point of letting their merriment burst forth, but happily too civil to so insult me to my face, they chose to retire silently, on tiptoe and with endless precautions, each more grotesque than the last. At the end of five minutes, the room was almost empty, and I remained alone. Alone!—not quite.

Madame d'Alibon, who had made a pretence of going out like the others, returned and closed the door, then seeing me break into a loud fit of laughter, and uncertain what was really in my mind, she came up to me, and said in her sweetest tones:

"Oh, Monsieur de Roquelaure, how I must beg pardon of you!"

"Of me? And why, *chère Madame d'Alibon*?"

Of what have I to complain? And of what are you guilty?"

"Oh, if you have been insulted here, I protest I have had no part or share in it, and if I had known how to oppose . . ."

"The harmless pleasure that your husband has allowed himself? 'Fore Gad, you would have been quite wrong. For you would have deprived him of a keen delight, and me of the most farcical scene that I was ever present at in my life."

"What, you are not vexed?"

"I? On the contrary."

"You bear me no ill will?"

"Bear *you* ill will, when you defended me so warmly. You, whose goodwill I might never have known had it not been for this unforeseen occurrence."

"You do but complete the admirable opinion I had formed of you," said Madame d'Alibon. "Your character, sir, is in no way inferior to your wit, and the way you have taken the part they wanted you to play, shows that you deserved no such treatment, and not you, but they, stand in urgent need of a lesson,"

"They are not all alike," said I, with an appearance of some embarrassment. "All are not guilty alike, and I know one whom for my part . . ."

"Whom you think more guilty than the others?"

"A hundred times more!"

"My husband?"

"You have named him, madam; I do not think I should have dared to, in your presence."

"You show me yet another of your qualities."

"And it is?"

"That you are generous."

"Oh, not always!"

"You are right, Monsieur de Roquelaure; there are circumstances in which . . ."

"It is allowable to harbour rancour?"

"Better than that—allowable to avenge oneself."

Perhaps Madame d'Alibon did not attach all the significance to this phrase that I desired it should carry. But from that instant, I thought her a thousand times more beautiful. On her features, animated by her displeasure, mantled a blush that gave them a celestial and superhuman quality. Her eyes glowed like two carbuncles; and then the word "vengeance" is so enchanting from a woman's lips. When uttered by a soft, musical voice and passing across a row of almost transparent pearls, the word is no longer cruel and frightful. No one would tremble or shudder at it. To hear a lovely creature speak of vengeance, is to listen to the sweetest concert that can charm a man's ears. The most subtle play of the mind, the most delicate coquetry, with rebellious wooings

and mysterious sighs, in a word, all that stirs us, all that enslaves us, all that carries us away, is included in this magical word as in a talisman made by the fairies' hands. To avenge oneself! Madame d'Alibon had spoken of my avenging myself.

A brilliant, glorious, mad idea suddenly crossed my mind.

Vengeance is a sort of duel; a combat on the chosen ground, if she would be my second.

We had gradually approached the window. The jealousy was lowered, and allowed of our seeing without being seen. If the scene that passed under our eyes had been expressly devised by some malicious divinity, it could not have filled me with more joy than I experienced.

D'Alibon, surrounded by the circle of his friends, had abandoned himself to the noisy impulses of exaggerated pleasure. He was laughing—laughing as if he would burst; and Bohlmann, who laughed a little less, for he had the dull, phlegmatic character of the German, vented a sort of unpleasant grunting, amidst which some satirical sally against me could be heard now and then, and this was always sure of being received by the bravos of the silly and half-drunken crowd. I say it with keen sorrow and profound regret, but even those whom I had thought to be on my side, even those, gorged with food and sated with generous wines, had passed

over to the enemy with arms and baggage, and were having at me likewise, to their hearts' content. Beyond question I was a simpleton, a braggart, an impudent fellow, a rascal, a rogue, a bungler, an ignoramus. I saw that a moment would come when, having exhausted their vocabulary, they would be obliged to invent new words in order to depict the incredible extent of my stupidity more strikingly. The worthy folk could not have done with it. They showed the highest point to which vinous loquacity could be carried. I did not tire of hearing them, and in truth I was inwardly rejoicing that they were so pleased, and I the cause of their pleasure. Madame d'Alibon was furious.

"They make me pity them," said she, letting me retain the hand that I had taken as if unthinkingly. "They make me pity them, and yet I think them abominable."

"I think they are very droll, and nothing else."

"*He* especially."

"Oh, *he*—he is beyond all doubt, the most amusing of the troupe."

"Say the most cowardly!"

"He is overcome by wine."

"To take advantage, in that way, of a friend's good faith!"

"Friendship must be allowed privileges."

"But you were his guest! It was a piece of treachery."

"How should I complain, since the plainest result of it all, is that they have gone and have left me alone with you?"

"You will try in vain to exonerate D'Alibon. I detest him for it."

"In that case, I am infinitely obliged to him for his malace."

"What! You would pardon him?"

"Entirely; since, by your welcome words, you undertake to repair the harm he has done me."

"I am less indulgent than you, and I protest I will punish him."

"I am ready to help you."

"I will see you are avenged on him."

"I accept; but do not let us delay till to-morrow."

At the same time I inclined my head towards Madame d'Alibon's neck, and placed an eager kiss upon it, which startled her.

She retreated a pace and said:

"What are you doing?"

"You see."

"Well?"

"I am punishing D'Alibon!"

"And the punishment falls upon me!" she said with a smile that was half mastered by her other feelings.

"I justly claim reprisals; will you refuse them to me?"

"Of course! The innocent ought not to suffer for the guilty."

"You reason very coldly about a matter in which you should but take counsel of your heart."

Ah, if one obeyed one's heart, rare follies would be done!"

"Let your heart guide you. If the heart sometimes makes us stray, the paths to which it sends us are so easy and so sweet, that we must, after all, admit the heart is the wisest and most disinterested of all the secret advisers we obey."

And, as I spoke thus, I put my arms about the slim and supple waist of Madame d'Alibon.

"Leave me and say no more," said she, in a suppressed tone. "I see that at table you were economising your powers of eloquence and seduction. I knew, for my part, that you were very different . . . Monsieur de Roquelaure, Monsieur de Roquelaure, I beg of you . . ."

We were still by the window. The laughing troupe was still walking up and down in front of it and D'Alibon, in the midst of his little suite of idlers, had not yet come to the end of his buffoonery and facetiousness. The heady wine, of which he was full, carried him beyond all bounds, and he cried, while he waved his hat in the air :

"Gentlemen, I lay you a wager, take it who will. 'Tis I who vouch the stakes against all and sundry. One day or another, Roquelaure will end in

the usual way. He will certainly marry. Well, be his wife pretty or ugly, fair or dark, a blonde or a brunette, little or big, fat or thin, rich or poor, of the lowest, the middling, or the greatest class of nobles, I swear I will get her from him, under his nose and eyes, without his knowing how, or seeing what I am doing. That forehead of his, that does not cover three pennyworth of brains, ought to be remarkable for something or another, and it's I who will see to it, you need feel no anxiety. If I don't succeed within three months of his wedding—and that's not likely—I'll hand my estate of Lanthalet in Touraine to you all. Is it agreed?"

"Yes, yes, it's agreed!"

Madame d'Alibon had turned very pale during the latter part of this harangue. As for me I was but little alarmed at the baleful prophesying of this harmless seducer, but I took a note of them in my mind. We were like two persons started upon a steep slope, and unable to stop by reason of the very impetus of their own course. The more D'Alibon laughed, the graver his wife became, and the readier I was to avenge myself. The idea of stealing my wife had transported D'Alibon to a seventh heaven of pride and satisfaction, and our transports of anger corresponded to D'Alibon's transports of joy.

However the fumes of the supper gradually began to clear away, and through the interstices of

the jealousy we saw the commencement of a general separation. There was shaking of hands, and embraces were exchanged. Vows of the most candid and cordial friendship were pronounced on that very altar on which I had just been pitilessly sacrificed.

Bohlmann declared that he would disseminate my view of Cicero in every public place, and they clapped their hands at this. Their delight was enough to frighten a man, and my discomfiture was complete.

Now it was most important that D'Alibon should not find me in the company of his wife. Any explanation between us two would have been superfluous. My bewitching accomplice felt that perfectly well, and she led me to the end of a passage where, having opened a little door, hidden in the wall, she showed me a staircase, at the foot of which I gained the street, without having met a soul outside or in.

About a week after that there was a crowded assemblage at Madame de Rambouillet's, where all the conversation was of the fresh victory gained by M. d'Enghien, who had just effected the passage of the Rhine with his troops in a triumphal manner. We were divided into several little groups, and I happened to be in a place where I was almost out of sight, for, together with Vildieu, Boissat and Latour-Roquelaure, I was in the recess of a boudoir

furnished in the Spanish style. There we heard the conversation without taking part in it, and thus we could divert ourselves at what was said, approve without compromising ourselves, and even censure in all freedom.

There was no end to the eulogies upon M. d'Enghien, and he well deserved all the panegyrics that were uttered to his credit. When his exploits were in question truth could not but resemble flattery, and my own opinion is that in his case it is impossible to exaggerate praise. Madame de Rambouillet allowed everyone else to speak, and then said in her turn,

"*Mes chers amis*, if our friend the duke could hear you, he certainly would be even more charmed than we suppose. But I do not think any praises would be more welcome to him than those I shall bring to your notice, which have been offered to him, in the form of a letter, by a man whom we all admire. I will not tell you his name yet, for I want you to have the entertainment of guessing it."

"Where is the letter?" people asked eagerly.

"A copy of it has been given to me; but before I read it, an explanation is necessary. Do you remember a game we once played in company of the Duc d'Orléans, in which each one of us took the name of a fish?"

"Yes—yes," answered some of the guests.

"I remember that evening very well," I said

under my breath to Latour-Roquelaure. "You were the porpoise, and I the gudgeon."

"Well," continued Madame de Rambouillet, "M. d'Enghien took the part of the pike. And the author of the letter writes to him by this watery title. Listen attentively, judge the style, and, if you can, put the right signature at the end."

The company drew up around Madame de Rambouillet, who read the following letter :

Ah, good day, Goodman Pike, good day to you, Goodman Pike. I always suspected that the Rhine would not stop you; and knowing your powers, and how you love to swim in mighty waters, I thought that stream would not frighten you, and that you would pass it with as much glory as you have gained in other enterprises. But I rejoice that this has been yet more happily achieved than we had hoped, and that, while neither you nor yours lost a single scale, the very rumour of your name scattered all that was to be opposed to you. You have hitherto proved excellent for all the sauces you have been put in; but it must be confessed the German sauce gives you a fine flavour, and the laurels mingling in it set you off rarely. The emperor's following—who thought to fry you, and eat you with a pinch of salt—have had a success as big as my back is broad, and it is pleasant to see that those who boasted they would defend the Rhine banks, are not now sure of the banks of the Danube. By a fish's honour, I admire your way. There is no water so stormy, so deep, or so swift, but you will plunge into it headlong. In truth, neighbour, you give the lie to that proverb which says: Let flesh be young, and fish old. For though you are but a young pike, you have a firmness of consistency that

the oldest sturgeons cannot equal, and you carry matters through that they would not dare to have begun. So you cannot imagine how far your fame reaches. There are no ponds, no founts, no streams, no rivers, no seas where your victories are not celebrated; no still water where there are not thoughts of you, and no troubled water where your name is not noised abroad. Your fame reaches to the heart of the seas, flies on the surface of the waters, and the ocean that bounds the world does not bound your glory. The other day, my crony the turbot, and my crony the gurnard, with some other fish out of fresh water, were supping together with my crony the smelt, and there was introduced to us an old salmon who has been twice round the world, who had newly come from the West Indies, and had been taken as a spy in France, while he was following a salt-boat. He told us there were no depths so fathomless beneath the sea but you were known and feared there, and that the whales of the Atlantic Ocean sweated at every pore, and were like to melt if your name was but mentioned. He would have told us more, but he was in the stew, and that was the reason he could but speak with great difficulty. A great many things were told us by a school of fresh herrings, who came from the direction of Norway. They told us that about those lands the sea froze two months sooner than usual through the fear brought with the tidings of certain gannets, who related that you were turning your face towards the North; and they told us that the big fish which, as you know, devour the little ones, feared that you might do to them as they did to the others; that most of them had retreated under the Great Bear, judging that you would not go so far as that; that both strong and weak are in perturbation and fear, and particularly certain conger eels, which are already crying out as if you were flaying them and raising such a clamour as makes all the shore resound. Truth to tell, my crony, you are a terrible Pike. And, if I may say so without offence to the hippopotami, the sea-wolves,

and the dolphins themselves, the mightiest and most important inhabitants of the ocean are but poor crabs compared with you, and if you continue as you have begun, you will swallow up the sea and its fishes. Nevertheless, now that your glory is at that point that where we are assured it can go neither further nor higher, it is very fitting, as I think, that after so many fatigues you should come to refresh yourself in the Seine waters, and merrily divert yourself with the many pretty tenches, fine perches, and worthy trout that await you with impatience. And yet, great as is the desire they feel to see you, it does not equal mine, nor my zeal to prove to you how truly I am,

Your very humble servant and gossip

"Set your wits to work," said Madame de Rambouillet as she folded the note. "Do you know a fish capable of thinking and writing all that?"

"It's Cyrano," said one.

"It's Ménage," said another.

"It's Roquelaure"

"It's Mademoiselle de Scudéry"

"It's Chapelain."

"No one of them all," replied the Marquise; "and since you are such poor conjurors, I will tell you at once the name of the fish and that of the correspondent. It is the Carp who is writing to the Pike. The Pike, as you already know, is M. d'Enghien; the Carp is Voiture."

This being made known, everyone pretended he had more or less suspected the truth. But, in fact, nobody had guessed it. And for that matter, the

whole incident would have passed off as quietly as possible and would not have been worth relating but for the incident which capped the occurrence in the most grotesque and unexpected fashion.

One of the company advanced into the middle of the *salon* and cried :

"Upon my honour, Madame la Marquise, and gentlemen, I am extremely surprised at one thing, and that is, that just now, when for some reason or other, you were trying to name a man of wit, someone thought fit to mention Roquelaure !"

"Well?" said Madame de Ramboullet, who knew that I was there, and suddenly coloured up.

"Well," continued this rash person, who was no other than D'Alibon, "that's a wonder that I marvel at . . . Roquelaure and wit are strangers, and I, who say it, have all sorts of good reasons for being convinced that the gentleman has stolen his reputation, and is nothing but an ass . . ."

There was a murmur of dissent, which very opportunely gave me solace.

"I repeat, an ass!" said D'Alibon persisting. "Roquelaure knows *nothing at all*!"

At this I showed myself. The effect was immense, and D'Alibon turned deadly pale.

"You are mistaken," said I, with perfect calm. "*I know*, on the best authority, that you are a wittol."

I leaned towards him, and let fall this word,

which everybody perfectly understood, right into his ear.

"Sir, sir!" stammered D'Alibon, with his eyes exceedingly wide open. "Sir! . . . I know not what such a word can mean."

I noticed that M. d'Avond, another fool, and M. Huguelin were close to him.

"Ask those gentlemen!" I said to D'Alibon. They are experts in the matter, and will not refuse to supply you with all the explanations you can wish upon the point."

And then I withdrew gravely, without having displayed anger or raised my voice.

D'Alibon was at once so embarrassed, and so overcome with indignation, that he left without a word, and I did not see him again for six months.

CHAPTER IX

I stay with M. de Lesdiguières—At Grand-Mesnil—A breakfast—A singular dessert—The Chevalier de Bireuil—A merry wight—A mournful presence—An approaching marriage—M. de Lesdiguières and I are to be the bridegroom's friends—Bireuil unbosoms himself—The history of his amour with the fair Vanina Betucci—A portrait of the Italian girl—A declaration—Her family—Disappointment and resentment—Flora, the servant—The naval officer—An assignation at night—The key—An abominable treachery—A fatal interview—Vanina's despair—The surprise.

The most vivid recollections, I have preserved of my stay at the retired country seat of M. de Lesdiguières, at Grand-Mesnil, are particularly concerned with a melancholy event, wherein I played the double part of unconcerned onlooker, and active participator. We had just breakfasted one morning—as a people breakfast at the age at which I then was—when, by way of dessert, a visit was announced from one Monsieur Antoine de Bireuil, a gentleman of a very passably distinguished bearing, but of the lesser nobility and little known at Court, where he had been once presented in the short administration of the bishop of Beauvais. M. de Lesdiguières was much attached to this young man, and

told me, when he had ordered he should be shown up :

“ You are going to meet, my dear Roquelaure, one of the merriest and most easygoing fellows of this century. He could not have chosen a better moment to come, for he will help us to pass the time yet more agreeably ; he does not lack wit, his conversation often has much to impart, and I know besides that he is a zealous sportsman.”

This eulogy, delivered in the solemn tone of orations after drinking, was interrupted by the entrance of the person in question. And he certainly was a gentleman of an excellent deportment ; he carried his hat and his sword with elegance, and had as graceful an address as one could require ; but I confess I looked in vain for any trace in his countenance of that happy disposition and mirthful tendency of which Lesdiguières had told me. On the contrary, I had never seen a paler brow or a grimmer mien ; and, thought I, if this is the boon companion whom we are to charge with reviving our flagging gaiety, egad, it would be hard to recognise him by his label. If a hired mourner had been wanted for the funeral of a man of quality, this fellow might have been asked in all confidence. He could have played the part without the least affectation and with striking reality ; and it is more difficult than is supposed, to play the part of a despairing relative or an afflicted collateral.

Beyond question M. de Bireuil was not in his usual mood, for Lesdiguières was struck at the first glance with the change that appeared to have taken place in him. So he went to meet him with every sign of the keenest interest, and cried :

"Is it you, Bireuil? Why, what has happened to you? Why this gloomy face and funereal expression? I know you are almost alone in the world, for all your immediate relatives have long withdrawn from this planet, so are you in mourning for yourself? Tell us about it . . . everyone has his chagrins here below, and we shall be able to sympathise with yours."

M. de Bireuil allowed Lesdiguières to finish speaking; he saw that we were a little hot with wine, and, worthy young fellow that he was, he knew that a man must be indulgent for the kind of speech that plenty of the vintage of Champagne or of the Rhine brings out like flowers in a meadow. When this first fire had slackened, he replied with melancholy dignity :

"*Mon cher duc*, I am the unhappiest man in the world, and if you thought to find again in me the feather-head of past times, abandon your mistake; I am but the shadow of myself, I live like a machine, I eat for custom's sake, drink to avoid doing nothing, and walk only because I must. I have come to ask a service of you."

The mood, engendered by our repast, suggested

a grotesque idea to me. Was this unhappy M. de Bireuil going to ask one or other of us to run him through? He seemed so perfectly inconsolable, and his mournful face suggested such an invincible despair!

Lesdiguières stretched out his hand to him, and said:

"A service, Bireuil! You have only to mention it. You know that I am entirely at your orders."

"I thank you," said the Chevalier in a weak voice. "Is it not M. de Roquelaure, whom I see beside you?"

"The man himself."

Bireuil saluted me, and I returned his salute.

"Would you be willing," he said to me, "to associate yourself with Lesdiguières in doing the favour I hope to obtain of him?"

"I am at your service, Monsieur le Chevalier."

Bireuil collected himself, passed his hand across his forehead, which was wet with perspiration, gave vent to a sigh, which showed what oppression weighed upon his spirits, and said, with a perceptible effort:

"I am to be married to-morrow. Will you act as my witnesses?"

"You, my friend?" exclaimed Lesdiguières.

"Yes, I," replied Bireuil.

Well, if this man does not forget his wife on his wedding-day, as Brancas did, I thought, he is

quite equal to leaving her a widow before the business is rightly through; for Brancas had lost his wits, and this man is at his last breath, and if I were a woman I should prefer the former to the latter.

"But," said Lesdiguières, "you have never spoken to me about this marriage!"

"True."

"So it has been quite recently decided on?"

"A week ago, at most."

"And you are taking the step for—love?"

"Of necessity."

"'Tis forced upon you?"

"No. I have resigned myself to it."

"Of your own will?"

"Of my own will."

"So she is ugly?"

"She is as fair as an angel."

"And in spite of that, you detest her?"

"I adore her."

"Bireuil's short, drily given, and desperately laconic answers, made as dark and interesting a puzzle as could be desired. M. de Lesdiguières and I glanced at one another, as if seeking the hidden sense of this allegory, which threatened to be infinitely prolonged, unless we tackled it more closely.

"I don't understand anything about it," said Lesdiguières outspokenly, putting all reserve aside.

"I will make myself understood," said the Chevalier de Bireuil, with a sad smile, "and if you will be so good as to give me your attention . . ."

"Tell us, we are waiting."

"We made the chevalier sit down opposite to us, and he commenced as follows :

"Last year I was at Provins, whither I had been summoned on the matter of an inheritance. Would to heaven I had but confined myself within the limits of that tedious occupation, and had been satisfied with seeing clerks, proctors and barristers, a foolish tribe who would soon have disgusted me with the place, and have sent me back to your company at the earliest moment. But you know, Lesdiguières, I was fond of the world, of entertainments and gaiety, and I should have found it hard to accept cheerfully even a fortnight devoted to inaction in a remote spot—or rather, to give the thing its right name—devoted to *ennui*. At Provins I only knew M. F a salt-tax receiver. I went to see him; and his acquaintance, in lack of aught better, became a real solace to me in the midst of the worries to which I was subjected, by the difficulties of a long-drawn settlement with threats of a lawsuit. Zounds, I should have died of it, but for this worthy fellow who, to keep me employed, brought me acquainted with all his friends who received me, as I must hasten to con-

fess, with the most ready and thorough cordiality. among the houses which M. F . . . had thrown open to me, was one where I was to be found oftener than elsewhere. Not a day passed but I spent two or three hours at least in visiting the agreeable family of M. Betucci. The father was an Italian from the Abruzzi, who had been in the train of Mazarin when he came to France for the first time with the rank of Nuncio at the Court of Louis XIII. After that, being stricken with a rather serious malady, he had withdrawn to Provins, there to find the repose of which he stood in need. He lived alone with his daughter and a single servant, he led a tranquil life, drawing abundant resources from his patrimony, and from the pension of ten thousand livres, which his patron had bestowed upon him.

“This Italian had a daughter . . .”

This was the inward reflection made, both by M. de Lesdiguières and myself; for a glance and a smile passed between us, wherein, as it were, those five words were written. There, no doubt, was the whole heart of the intrigue, that was the source whence had flowed the first outpourings of a wild happiness which was destined, perhaps, to make a whole torrent of tears flow.

“I see you have guessed, without my having need to tell you,” resumed Bireuil, after a brief pause, “that Betucci’s daughter was in reality the

bait which drew me to that house in preference to all others. And, *mon cher duc*, it would in fact be impossible even for you, who have seen much, lived much, and enjoyed many loves—it would, I say, be impossible even for you to imagine anything more angelic and more accomplished than the lovely Vanina Betucci. Were I to try to depict to you the magnificent development of her form, the gleaming softness of her hair, the whiteness of her skin—white as a swan's plumage—and the languor of her eyes, I should not succeed in giving you more than an utterly insufficient idea of her incomparable loveliness. I should always fall short of her perfections, like the greatest painters, who, in spite of their efforts and of all their talent, ever fall short of nature and truth, let them do what they will. Besides, you will soon be able to judge her for yourselves, and I expect from your friendship complete frankness on that point. I have acquired the fatal habit of minutely analysing every sentiment of my heart and every occurrence of my life, and it would interest me to know whether passion has availed to blind me to the point of taking copper for gold, and a simple inlet for the ocean."

"To resume——"

"You are awaiting the inevitable phrase, and in this case, indeed, it is more indispensable than ever. I could not see Vanina without being violently enamoured of her, and, rightly or wrongly, I fancied I

was not indifferent to her. Every illusion haunts the domain of love. So upon this idea I allowed myself to build castles in the air, each one more splendid than the last, and I was decided to take any and every step for winning Vanina. I only thought of bringing the affair to a conclusion, the more so as I was master of my actions, and if I succeeded in pleasing her, there should be no obstacle in the path of my desires. Her mother had been a woman of weak character and very vain, so wanting in energy that she had no will of her own, but had she been alive her pride would have been flattered by the prospect of an alliance with me. The father was a genuine countryman, whose one pleasure was visiting his farms and watching the progress of his harvests, and he seldom embarrassed me by his presence; when he was with us he displayed a cordial friendship for me. So I was able to pay my court to Vanina in all freedom, and it is scarcely worth while to tell you that I made the best use of the advantages of my position.

“The early days passed in such fashion as to inspire me neither with confidence nor despondency. Vanina listened to me, and though she did not respond to my enthusiasm as I wished, at least I could not perceive that it distressed her to listen to me. Thus, matters remained for long—I was in doubt—and she preserved a kind of enigmatic neutrality. At last this condition of affairs became

intolerable to me, and I sought to have a plain explanation with her. Our conversation, as near as I can give it, ran thus:

“‘Vanina, dear Vanina, either you are the most insensible of women or the most coquettish beauty upon earth. Are you going to leave me longer a prey to this doubt which is killing me?’

“‘I am neither insensible nor a coquette,’ said she, ‘in that, believe me . . . But if I appear either one or the other, I should still have occasion to ask, Monsieur de Bireuil, how it matters to you and how you are concerned?’

This coolness in her had on me the effect of a handful of powder thrown upon the flames.

“‘What,’ cried I, ‘since I have been visiting this house, have you not understood my conduct?’

“‘Not at all.’

“‘Vanina, you delight in driving me to despair.’

“‘I have no wish to do so.’

“‘Vanina, you speak thus to try me.’

“‘I do not understand what you mean.’

“‘Then my glances and my sighs . . .’

“‘I paid no attention to them.’

“‘And the confession I made to you more than a month ago, one day when your father had gone out?’

“‘A confession? I know not,’ replied the lovely Italian with grave dignity, ‘if you were so imprudent as to make one to me. But it is certain, if you did so, that I did not understand it.’

“And she left me without saying a single further word.

“To convey to you how disconcerted, disappointed and enraged I was, would be impossible. I remained alone on the spot where she had left me, motionless and overwhelmed, as if a thunderstroke had stricken me to unconsciousness. I could not get over it. My memory repeated with eagerness and with astonishing exactness every word, every step, and even every gesture that I could, without too great fatuity, have interpreted in my favour, and I finally persuaded myself—and it is a horrible thought!—that I had been fooled by a flirt, that is to say, in clearer and simpler words, that she had taken me for a dupe. Once this opinion was firmly established in my mind the idea of vengeance was quick to follow it. The dream had been so sweet that the awakening was horrible. Yes, I thought that thenceforward vengeance alone could reconcile me to life, and I swore to be even with the jilt and to attain by desperate methods, if need be, the happiness which her affections denied me. The opportunity was not long in coming, and she herself, without suspecting it, supplied me with this opportunity, as you will easily divine.

“I had continued my visits to the Betucci household, and nothing in my outward demeanour was changed. Only when I was with Vanina I maintained a close reserve. Further, as a man accustomed to the

artifices of war, and desirous to have an informant in the camp, I had won over to my side by bribes a certain Flora, a vile creature of some fifty years who served her as chamber-woman, and whom I had charged to keep me precisely *au courant* of everything that might be of interest to me.

"One night I had withdrawn in a worse humour than usual, because Vanina had appeared more pre-occupied and estranged than ever, and I had proceeded about a hundred paces from the house when my attention was caught by a mysterious call, uttered behind me several times.

"I turned my head and saw a woman running after me in the darkness. It was Flora.

" 'What is the matter?' I asked her eagerly.

" 'Let us go a little further on,' she said to me. 'We are not in safety here.'

"We walked forward for a minute or two, she saying nothing and I burning with impatience for her tidings. At length she resumed:

" 'I have no need to tell you, Monsieur le Chevalier, how entirely I am devoted to your service.'

" 'I know it. Proceed.'

" 'Your kindness has not fallen on ungrateful soil, and I think I have already proved that.'

"I understood that this needless recapitulation of the past was a direct appeal to my liberality in the present, and I slipped a purse into her hand. The crone expected as much, for her hand was open and

she had only to close it tightly, while she said to me in a whisper, 'There is news.'

" 'Tell it at once.'

" 'I know now why you are rejected.'

" 'Why?'

" 'You have a rival.'

" 'A rival? Are you sure of it? Who told you? How do you know it?'

"And while I poured this shower of eager questions on the crone, I gripped her arm wildly.

" 'Let me go, let me go, Monsieur le Chevalier, you are hurting me.'

" 'Answer, then.'

" 'I am certain of what I have said.'

" 'You are certain! That is not true; you are lying.'

" 'If you are unwilling to believe me,' said the servant, making a feint of leaving me, 'it is not worth while to consult me. Besides, I am an honest woman, and only take money I have earned. Take back your purse.'

" 'Well, enough of this. I am calm, and you can continue now. So you say that Vanina . . .'

" 'Vanina loves a handsome young man, Monsieur le Chevalier—oh! yes, a handsome young man, who used to come here about two years ago.'

" 'And you have been concealing this from me,' I cried, beside myself with rage.

" 'La! Monsieur le Chevalier, I supposed it was

all over and done with, and that there would be no more storms from that quarter. Absence is so risky; but it seems that Mademoiselle Vanina . . .'

" 'Well?'

" 'It seems that Mademoiselle Vanina has a stronger memory than I supposed, and that she has not forgotten.'

" 'And this young man—his name?'

" 'He is called Frederick Munster.'

" 'His country?'

" 'Holland.'

" 'And his rank?'

" 'A naval officer, under the orders of Admiral Tromp.'

" 'And what proof have you of all this?'

" 'Wait, and you shall see the proof. Do you see this key? It opens Mademoiselle Vanina's door. Captain Frederick has obtained leave and a permit to travel in France. He arrived in Provins yesterday, and he is coming to-night. I was told to hand this key to him—but I will give it to you.'

"I was so confused, jealousy and fury blinded me to such an extent, that I did not recoil in horror from the abominable treachery of this woman, to whom, as I had just learned, Vanina had committed her secret, and who had not shrunk from shamefully selling it to me. Upon a little reflection I should have indignantly rejected complicity in such a piece of infamy, and at the risk of betraying

my plans, I should have refused to take advantage of such odious information. But was I in a state to reflect? My head swam, I was hot and cold at the same time, I trembled, stammered, and my fists clenched themselves; I was a madman! I only saw a means of humbling Vanina, of making her repent her unkindness, and I was thoroughly resolved, once I had proved to her that my love had changed to deep disdain, to leave her in silence and never see her again. I never even thought of weighing the probability of Flora's assertions. Doubt found no place in my mind, and while absorbed in savage joy at the prospect of vengeance that opened before my eyes, I thought of nothing but putting into execution an infernal plot, for which a servant was to supply the means, after inspiring me with the idea."

Bireuil paused again as if this recital had subjected him to fresh torture by the memories which it evoked. M. de Lesdiguières coughed loudly in order to escape the need of passing any comment. I blew my nose with the same intent, so that we might well have been at the Hotel de Bourgogne during one of the *entr'actes* of Du Ryer's "Alcyonée" or Rotrou's "Wenceslas."

"As I told you just now," resumed Bireuil, "I did not immediately feel how odious it was, that I should play second in which Vanina, even admitting all her faults, would take the *rôle* of victim—and of a victim sacrificed by cowardly schemes. Every

sentiment had abandoned my heart except anger and jealousy. My insight and my intelligence were muffled by a thick veil through which I could distinguish neither the true form nor the real value of things. In a word, I took the fatal key from Flora's hand, I made her give me such indications as were necessary for the expedition that I was contemplating, I listened to them with feverish attention, and after I had taken several instructions from her, I sent her about her business sharply, not well knowing why I secretly hated her, but feeling more disgusted than I can tell at having her at my side.

"When Flora had quitted me, and thus, as it were, restored me to myself, the most incompatible ideas invaded my wretched brain. Sometimes my blood bounded with fury at the mere thought of Vanina, sometimes I murmured her beloved name, and felt myself filled with unspeakable pity for her. But this gentle prompting was always of short duration, and it was easy to see that the blind violence of my passions would master my last weak scruples. The hour which the crone had mentioned to me, soon came, and I returned mechanically towards Betucci's dwelling.

"Flora was determined that nothing should thwart so important a business. She was watching at the door for my arrival. Everyone in the house had withdrawn to rest. From her hand, as old and wrinkled as a time-stained parchment, dangled a

lantern that shed a pale and sad light around us, she showed me the passage that led to the foot of the staircase which communicated with Vanina's room, and said to me in a voice that I should never forget, though I lived to be a hundred.

“ ‘ Good luck, and good night, Seigneur Cavalier. The *other* may come when he likes now. He will find the door shut.’ ”

“ I knew my way in the house perfectly well. I slowly mounted the stairs, and at every step my heart beat as if it would burst my breast. At last I found myself at Vanina's door, I put the key in the lock, and opened. A lamp was alight, which threw a clear and bright light on every object in her charming nest. My eyes turned first towards her bed.

“ Vanina was asleep. Her fair face, resting softly on the pillow, was flushed with the delicate warm tint that is a gift of sleep. One of her arms lay without the coverture, and had pressed back the sheet far enough to disclose a part of her bosom ; curving sweetly forward, it was open to my glances, white, naked, and palpitating as she breathed. Her raven hair, loosened, flowed over her white shoulders. The soul's repose, the heart's purity, the most perfect peace was exhaled by this blissful picture. Never had any sight moved in the very depths of my nature such diverse and conflicting sentiments. My joy was stifled by the horror I felt at my own conduct, and my admiration was frozen by remorse.

"Vanina was as yet only in her first slumber. She was awakened by the noise I made as I approached her, and the first effect of her terror was to render her motionless and silent. She stretched out her arms, crouched back, and, looking at me with haggard eyes, stammered as one who with difficulty recalls himself from the obscurity of dreams.

" 'Who are you?'

"I did not reply. I could not have done so. But gradually the light grew within her eyes, she seemed at last to regain some clearness of mind, and sitting up while she covered herself as best she could with the sheet, she resumed in a firmer tone, but with such anguish as rent my heart.

" 'It is you! What are you doing here?'

"I had no intention, as you may well imagine, of at once confessing my insulting suspicions and the dark schemes of Flora. Besides, I was so extremely overcome that I had almost forgotten the past in my emotions of the moment.

" 'Vanina,' I cried, as I fell upon my knees, 'Vanina, forgive me.'

" 'Forgive you! When you drive me to despair, when you are compassing my ruin. Do you not know that if my father came here now, he would kill me!'

"There was such a force of truth in this exclamation of Vanina's that my whole frame trembled as if I had heard Betucci's poignard mangling her flesh.

Had she but determined at that moment to use her advantage and profit by my abashed state, nothing would have been easier for her than to put me to the rout. But, by mischance, she adopted a resolute silence, while she gazed furtively towards the door from time to time, letting every sign of keen anxiety and ardent impatience appear in her demeanour. Then the demon of malevolence took possession of my senses for the second time. No! it was not the arrival of her father that she dreaded, but the arrival of her lover. It was not the dread of dishonour that made her bosom heave and tortured her mind, it was fear of being discovered by him alone with me, at that guilty hour, by him who was her beloved master. These thoughts lit a horrible, pitiless, destroying fire within my head. I was convinced that Vanina was fooling me. At the risk of crushing her hopes and her illusions, at the risk of quenching those bright sparks that shone in her glances, I prepared to carry to the bitter end my work of her persecutor and assassin.

“ ‘Vanina,’ I said, bending towards her pillow, ‘do you not now think that I have discovered the surest way of bringing a flirt to reason? Everywhere else, each circumstance, each external object conspires to aid the unfeeling woman who tricks the love she has inspired by entrenching herself behind the impregnable rampart of her indifference and coldness. But here it is different, here are none of

those cunningly devised pretences that serve to mask a woman's thought and conceal it from prying minds as a curtain before a window intercepts the light of day. Here are none of those false incitements that a moment later are replaced by disdain, none of those allurements of the siren to be followed soon by a smile of raillery. Here the weapons are equal, Vanina. Here man, strong but credulous, is not the plaything of woman, weak but deceitful. She is abandoned to the resources of her mind and her heart, and to them alone, and if a conflict begins the chances are equal on both sides—at least, it cannot be guessed in advance with whom the honours of the contest will remain. For these reasons I determined to see you alone, Vanina. I have had enough of oscillating between fear and hope, between the fairest dreams and the most forbidding realities. I resolved to free myself of this horrible doubt; I resolved to know my destiny.'

" 'And mine, Monsieur,' replied Vanina, mournfully, 'did you condescend to give a thought to that? Perhaps the lot of a man who is unhappy in his love deserves pity, but do you think the lot of a dishonoured girl enviable?'

" 'Here there is no question of dishonour, Vanina; this meeting which you did not grant me, and which I have won by my own resources, shall be known to nobody. I alone will keep—for ever—the memory of it in my soul and the picture of it before my

eyes. Ah, no doubt it will be a different thing for you. She who awaits the object of her own heart's choice thinks it cruel to be confronted with the enemy of her repose—yes, the enemy, for I love you well enough, Vanina, to make you repent of having flouted me and to avenge myself for your scorn.'

" 'So much anger against a wretched woman!' said Vanina, joining her hands, which were agitated by a feverish tremor. 'You are not a gentleman, Monsieur.'

" 'We shall see that soon,' I replied, carried away by a wild and crazy jealousy. 'We shall see if my sword does not shine in the light of day—if only Monsieur Frederick Munster is punctual . . .'

" 'That name! How did you learn that name?' said she half raising herself, pale and trembling.

" 'What does that matter? Does not your own confusion accuse you? Now it is plain to me that you have befooled me, that Frederick is indeed your lover, and that you expect him to-night.'

" 'I!'

"After this exclamation, drawn from the depths of Vanina's heart, with an accent that no human phrasing could convey, she fell back upon her bed as if she had succumbed to a sudden faintness. She seemed no longer to see me. I might have thought she had forgotten I was there. And yet sometimes she pressed her hands to her temples and seemed to search in her mind for the solution of a

terrible enigma. Never had such charming beauty been presented to my sight, reduced to so miserable a plight. And I own that at this spectacle my anger completely abandoned me, and my suspicions vanished. I felt how blameworthy and hateful my behaviour was. I accused myself for having broken not only the laws of courtesy, but even those of humanity, and I was at once regretful and afraid for what I had done, or rather, for what I had been incited to do. And at the same time the hideous, fatal and repellant face of Flora presented itself to my mind. I shuddered to think that I had abased myself to the point of showing confidence in a creature unworthy to live, and that I was as great a coward as she a traitress. All this remorse, all this inward struggle evoked in my mind a phantasy whose terrifying shadows I strove in vain to keep off; and I was on the point of yielding to this combined attack, when a strange noise recalled me to myself and drew me mechanically towards the window.

A similar effect had roused Vanina from her deep depression. She too seemed to scatter the dark fancies that had gathered round her, and her glance followed me in the movement I had just made.

"The sounds grew louder, and I placed my hand on the fastening.

"Then Vanina forgot everything, even her insulted woman's dignity and her girlish modesty. Terror had made her mad. She swept aside the sheet with

a quick movement, leaped to the foot of the bed, and careless of her disorder, without even thinking of replacing upon her breast the covering of fine linen where it had fallen open at her throat, she came up to me and said in a tone which admitted of no answer :

“‘Leave this window. In the name of all you love in the world, do not open it.’

“‘I obey; but for pity’s sake explain to me.’

“‘Nothing! Hold your peace.’

“I did not move. The noise increased, the light grew each instant brighter, it filled the courtyard and reached the staircase. Vanina crouched back, growing yet paler and shivering like one who bends his head under the executioner’s axe.

“‘It is my father,’ she whispered in a fainting voice.

“I would have taken a step towards her, but with an imperious gesture she checked me, and her terror began to take possession of me.

“Then the door was opened.”

CHAPTER X

Vanina's History continued—Her father—M. de Bireuil astounded—A mystery disclosed—Flora's part in it—The guilty one forgiven—The conditions of the pardon—Bireuil accepts them—Vanina's resignation—Preparing for happiness—Painful suspense—We go to Provins—A melancholy visit—A joyous marriage—My singular presentiment in Church—The return home—Alarming symptoms—Confidences—A tragic ending—We console Bireuil as best we can—Farewell to the country—We return to Grand-Mesnil—Madame de Lesdiguières—This lady's opinion of me—Lesdiguières as my advocate—I make a strange resolve—A journey with a charming woman—Gallantry by night—A fool's prudence—It is taken in ill part—The lady's letter to her husband—The postscript—I mean to have my revenge—A visit to the Princesse de Guéménée—Mazarin at the Palais-Royal.

Bireuil paused for a moment to take breath and wiped away the sweat that streamed from his forehead. One might have supposed that his thoughts, thus carried back to that exciting scene, had reproduced around him the details in their fatal reality.

He resumed thus :

"A white and venerable head appeared in the doorway—the head of old Betucci. He stopped

pale, and as if petrified by indignation. His demeanour was calm, and his gaze cold, but there was a mighty storm of anger beneath that quiet appearance, and I divined that the bursting of it would not be long delayed. I know not if it were because I felt unnerved and humiliated in my guilt, but in any case I resolved to concentrate upon myself, the explosion of his just anger, and stepping towards the old man, I said to him :

“ ‘ Sir, in the name of the living God, whom you respect, and in the name of your daughter who is innocent, listen to me.’

“ ‘ What have we to discuss together ? ’ said the outraged father coldly, while he eyed me with scorn. ‘ If I think well to speak to you presently, you will answer me, but you have no right to question me. Rather pray to Heaven that I grant you the right to defend yourself.’

“ When he had thus spoken, he went straight to Vanina’s bed.

“ ‘ For pity’s sake ! ’ I exclaimed.

“ ‘ Silence,’ resumed the old man, in an impetuous tone ; ‘ did not you hear what I told you ? ’

“ Vanina had half-raised herself, and was looking at us with anguish depicted on her features. Betucci, turning towards her, continued, raising his hand solemnly :

“ ‘ You are no longer my daughter. When I brought you from Italy you were as pure as the

angels of heaven. God is my witness that I have done all I could to preserve that innocence, that precious glass that the least breath blurs, the innocence which to an honourable girl should be a thousand times dearer than life. Your mother is dead, and I thought to have replaced her in your life. My vigils, my labours, my hopes all tended to this supreme end, that I might ensure your happiness in the future and guard you from every evil influence and every shameful temptation. I thought I had succeeded, but I was utterly deceived. You have betrayed my trust, and you have betrayed a noble young man, who, in his simple manliness, believed your vows, your truth, and those appearances of virtue that you assume with such deceitful cleverness. From this day there is nothing in common between you and me. I am no longer your father, you are no longer my daughter; and as the same roof must not shelter the insulted father and the perverted daughter, there is the door, Vanina—I turn you from my house.’

“Doubtless the poor child would have preferred a swift and terrible death to the slow and agonizing chastisement that her father had just inflicted upon her. Her sobs stifled her, she was wringing her hands and could not find strength enough to implore her pardon. At all risks I determined to intervene. The effort which the old man made upon himself to control his rage had, so to say, reduced

him to powerlessness, and so overwhelmed and dejected him, that he was incapable of resisting a firmly resolved will.

“ ‘Sir,’ said I to Bertucci in a respectful tone, ‘I understand your indignation, and I am not so mad as to seek to excuse a base fault, a fault which, according to my own view, is unworthy of leniency or pardon. But if for myself I accept the blame, if I do not seek to palliate the wrong for which repentance will make me pay dearly, at least let it be permitted me to invoke your justice for your daughter, who—I swear it before God—is yet worthy of your affection and your kisses. Do not turn aside your head, sir; what I say is true, and time will confirm the solemn declaration that I have just made in this place.’

“ ‘Give me the palpable, clear, evident proof that she is not your accomplice, and then, perhaps . . .’

“ Bertucci stopped, as if he feared that he had said too much. But I saw how to take advantage of this incipient weakness of his, and I at once replied :

“ ‘The proof! Do you not see it in your daughter’s despair? in the very imprudence of my conduct? in the voice of my remorse? Permit me one question, sir. You have been warned of my presence here? Who gave you that warning? Was it not your servant Flora, who . . .’

“ ‘It was she, Monsieur le Chevalier, and I am truly grateful to her for it. I have for long enter-

tained suspicions, and I had promised her, if she aided me to elucidate them, a recompense worthy of so great a service."

"‘That recompense,’ I interrupted impetuously, ‘I hope she will never have.’

"‘Why so?’ said the old man, in a tone full of bitterness. ‘Do I not now know what I wished to know, and will not the money have been well earned?’

"‘The wretched creature is the cause of all this disaster,’ I cried, suddenly enlightened by a sort of presentiment. ‘You do not know, and I cannot explain to you, sir, by what detestable plottings that hateful schemer has brought me to this room, the key of which she gave me without my asking it of her. But believe me, for pity’s sake, believe me! I have done utterly wrong, that I own; but all this black intrigue was woven by that devilish old hag, Flora, and she had but one aim in it all, which was to receive the price of her double treachery at one and the same time.

"My words seemed to produce a strong effect upon Betucci, who however exclaimed, while his glance scrutinized me keenly:

"‘You are deceiving me, you the seducer, just as she, the seduced girl, deceived me.’

"‘In favour of my sincerity,’ I replied with calm, ‘I have invoked witnesses that cannot be fooled with impunity. Do you think that at my age I should

render Heaven the accomplice of perjury, or should have so little care for the safety of my soul as to commit so abominable a sin?’

“The old Italian is extremely religious,” said Bireuil, when he had again paused to take breath, “and this last remark weighed with him much more than what I had previously said.”

“‘It is true,’ he continued, now more self-controlled, ‘that the fear of God is never entirely extinguished in the heart. Do you swear to me that she is not guilty?’

“‘I swear it.’

Betucci collected himself, pressing both hands to his forehead for a moment. He resumed in tones that were less severe, but betrayed even greater emotion :

“‘Vanina, just now I cursed you ; may God with the breath of his heavenly mercy erase the mark of anger which then darkened your brows, and, in your turn, forgive me.’

“‘My father!’ murmured the girl, bursting into tears.

“‘Yes, weep, my child,’ said the old man impressively. ‘For though your honour is safe in my eyes it is not safe in the eyes of the world, and there is but one means of repairing the harm that has been done. The condition I am about to dictate to you and to Monsieur le Chevalier de Bireuil is inviolable and must not be opposed. As you know I should

refuse to survive your disgrace, which would be mine as well. Do you promise to obey me ? ’

“ ‘Yes, my father.’

“ ‘And you, Monsieur le Chevalier,’ he continued, addressing himself to me, ‘will you do what I say ? ’

“ ‘I have too grievously wronged you,’ I answered with sincere humility, ‘not to consider myself bound to make you any kind of reparation. Speak, I await your orders.’

“ ‘You will be married within a week,’ said Betucci gravely.

“I bowed in token of assent, and could not repress a thrill of joy, for I must tell you, my friends, that I am still madly in love with Vanina. As for her, her silence was but broken by a sort of inward shudder of which I could not grasp the real meaning. But at length she murmured,

“ ‘Let it be as you wish, my father ! ’

“When we came down again we were struck by a strange circumstance. Flora, though several times summoned, did not reply. We sought her in vain for more than an hour. She had left the house—never to return. The detestable woman had not quitted the place with empty hands.”

“That was a week ago, my friends,” continued Bireuil with the utmost emotion ; “a week has passed since all this happened, and the marriage is fixed for to-morrow. May I reckon upon you ? ”

"Certainly," answered M. de Lesdiguières, "but upon one condition."

"What is it?"

"That you will abandon this gloomy bearing, which makes you resemble a familiar of the Holy Inquisition, and be a little merrier."

"Can I be merry," replied the lover in a plaintive tone, "when Vanina . . ."

"Well! what more is the matter with her?"

"During the week that has just passed," said Bireuil, "she has aged by ten years. I have taken her aside and cast myself at her feet: I have begged her to tell me if my death would restore her to the happiness she has lost. She gives me this one reply: 'I must be your wife, my father has decided so, and it shall be so.'"

I will pass lightly over Bireuil's further lamentations. They would fill a folio, and I think it better to carry the reader with us at once to Provins, where we made the acquaintance of the beautiful and hapless Vanina. The portrait which Bireuil has drawn was in no way exaggerated. She was a very lovely creature, and her graces were enhanced by an air of dignity much above her rank. The time that elapsed between the day of our arrival and that of the marriage seemed very long to us, seeing that we had no diversions, and nothing could have been less mirthful than the company by which we were surrounded. The interior of Signor Betucci's house bore a strikingly

mournful appearance, and we really might have imagined ourselves in an asylum for the dumb. Happily it was but a brief period. When at length the great day came, we prepared ourselves at once for the wedding and our departure. That was a solace to me especially, for try as I would, I could not reconcile myself to the funereal faces of these worthy folk.

M. de Lesdiguières, who was older than I, busied himself about a host of details, with which I for my part was heartily glad to be unconcerned. I had no proneness towards matrimony, and those sorts of ceremonies killed me with *ennui*. But we had to do our duty, and we set out for the church at the moment when the clocks were striking mid-day.

Though I was as distracted from the matter in hand as a young man can be, I could not escape a keen emotion when I saw the bride enter her coach. Vanina showed despair on every feature; her eyes were dull and lifeless, and grief seemed to have crystallised the tears upon them.

When we entered the church the priest was waiting. Although every suitable preparation for the wedding had been made, everything appeared to me—why I know not—mournful and sepulchral. Never had the aspect of a church filled we with such a strange fear.

The ceremony commenced, amidst general attention, and the impression it produced was general and

deep. Betucci burst into tears. Vanina, who grew paler and paler, seemed scarcely to hear the priest's exhortations. The only face on which a spark of hope or of happiness could be seen was that of the Chevalier de Bireuil, who was inwardly convinced that, when once the first hours were passed, tranquillity would reappear on every face. The poor fellow clung to his future as best he could.

I will spare you the incidents of the rite, which, as may easily be imagined, resembled all of the same order, and we will, if you please, return with the accustomed pomp to the father's house.

Bireuil was more assiduous than ever at Vanina's side; but the bride answered all his ardour with coldness. He was profuse in his vows, protestations, and caresses. She remained unresponsive and cold; she might have been a marble statue.

Astonishment began to give way to anxiety.

Of a sudden Vanina seemed to be overcome by weakness.

We rushed to her assistance, aid was summoned.

"Stay," she said in a feeble voice, "it is nothing, I am feeling better."

"No, you are ill," cried Bireuil with anguish.

"My poor child," sighed the old man.

"Gentlemen," resumed Vanina after a moment of silence, addressing herself to M. de Lesdiguières and me, "you have just been witnesses of my union with M. le Chevalier de Bireuil. Be so good, I beg

you, as to let me claim your kind services once more, I wish to speak to you alone."

She indicated both of us. Betucci made a sign to the Chevalier, and they retired together.

"You have been obeyed, Madame," said Lesdiguières, as he returned from shutting the door.

"I thank you," said Vanina, and she wiped some drops of perspiration from her brow.

"We are all attention," said I in my turn, taking the hand that she stretched out to me with a painful effort.

She collected such energies as remained to her, and asked us, with a voice that vibrated to the depths of our souls :

"Gentlemen, upon your honour, do you believe that the Chevalier de Bireuil loves me ? "

We exchanged glances of enquiry, and replied with one voice :

"On our honour we believe it."

"Then," cried she with a sort of inspiration, "may God pardon him my death, as I pardon him at this moment."

"Your death ! "

"Yes, my death, be quiet, and do not call ! I determined to die ; the minutes are passing quickly, listen to me. I do not know if he told you of the occurrences of one terrible night."

"He has confessed all to us," said Lesdiguières, interrupting, "and his repentance."

"Is sincere—I would believe it, I do believe it. But what was his callousness—or his remorse—to me? My life once seemed to me like one long chain by which I ever sought to bind the future to the past. He has broken but a link, it is true, but it was the link that reached my heart. From that day forth I was stricken, and I was ripe to die. But first it was necessary to place in inviolable safety the honour of the girl and of the aged man, my honour and my father's. They told me that only marriage with the man who had so cruelly wronged me could repair the mischief. And I submitted to necessity. But I accepted the reparation with reservations. Before all things, I was bound by an oath to a man whom I love. I had sworn to await Frederick Munster's return. After suffering so many misfortunes, I cannot await him here, I hope to await him in heaven."

Vanina's discomposed features confirmed only too fully the dreadful truth of her words. Hues of yellow and blue appeared all around her eyes, and she suddenly fell back in her chair. A secret and scarce manifest anguish was torturing and destroying her vitals. I advised Lesdiguières to keep close to her while I went in search of a doctor.

As I went out I met Bireuil, who sought to bar my passage. But I pushed him forcibly aside and made off at a run, after exclaiming to him,

"Unhappy wretch, it may be too late."

When I returned, accompanied by a surgeon and a physician, whom I summoned at hazard, the unhappy young woman was in her last struggles. Her head lay languidly, and her face only showed the fearful expression that accompanies such pain. She scarcely breathed.

The doctor gazed at her coldly, as a man of science habituated to these scenes of misery which have ceased to move him. After an examination which lasted about two or three minutes, he turned towards his companion, who was only there to render some kind of assistance or other, and said to him, lowering his voice,

“Nothing can be done.”

These words reached Betucci's ears; he started up as if he had heard one of those peals of thunder that shake the earth even in its deepest recesses. He tried to walk, but his legs refused their office, and he fell his length with a deep groan.

In the meanwhile the Chevalier de Bireuil, all whose faculties seemed to have deserted him during this scene, had thrown himself on his knees close to Vanina, and, clasping her in his arms, had been speaking to her and calling her by name, as if he thought that he, and he alone, possessed the secret of restoring her to life.

“Vanina,” he cried, sobbing, “Vanina, listen to me—answer me! My God, how cold she is! how hurried is her breathing! how she shivers! Do you

not hear me calling you? Vanina, for God's sake, awake!"

And then, breathless and incapable of striving further, he fell motionless and prone across the body of her who should have been his wife, and for more than a quarter of an hour held her in a close embrace.

Of what use would it be to sadden you with more details of that scene of affliction? The father was led away, crying forth his wish to be buried with his daughter, and as for her, a white veil was thrown over her face, and all was ended.

On the following day she was buried.

The Chevalier de Bireuil, as I said at the beginning of this story, had been one of the merriest souls in France. The blow was too heavy for him; he never got over it. All his gaiety was buried in Vanina's coffin. And we had the greatest trouble imaginable to get him to leave Provins. During the week that followed he was to be seen walking towards the cemetery with measured steps, as silent as the grave on which he went to weep. At one time we feared for his reason. Our continued cares, endeavours and attention at length availed to disperse, little by little, that universal apathy which, had he longer felt it to excess, must have brought him to madness, or to death. Without openly touching the weak point, we succeeded by degrees in restoring his sensibility that had been so miserably crushed, and to our great joy we at length perceived that we

had almost arrived at the end we had in view. Bireuil, of course, never recovered his light and mirthful disposition, but he accepted life, and that, after the condition in which I had trembled to see him, was a great matter.

To do due homage to truth, I must here avow that the country was beginning to weary me intolerably. I felt the want of Paris. I sighed for the troubles, the noisy ways and even the *ennuis* of the town. So I told M. de Lesdiguières plainly that I should make ready to return to the fold. I shall be forgiven for thus naming the only place on earth—if Versailles be included—where I have fully felt the happiness of being in this world, if it is one, which certain ill-natured philosophers deny, but I affirm for my part very positively.

We passed Grand-Mesnil upon our way; here M. de Lesdiguières had certain business to settle, and I now, for the first time, saw his wife, who had arrived during our absence. Madame de Lesdiguières had a choice of two alternatives; she could stop in the country, or return to Paris. The second prospect seemed to her a thousand times more agreeable than the first, and it was agreed that our departure should be put off two days, and that we should all three make the journey together.

This phase of my life has its significance. Never had any woman's beauty so immediately impressed me as that of Madame de Lesdiguières. I should,

however, say that, in spite of this first enthusiasm, I preserved all the chastity that was to be desired in such a case, and the effect so strongly wrought upon me has no parallel among all those which have left so many deep traces and charming souvenirs in my memory. I cannot say—for it would be exaggeration—that I fell in love with Madame de Lesdiguières at first sight, but in her company I experienced an embarrassment and a shyness that were not attributes of the age at which I then was, and which really surprised me. When it was decided that we should travel together, I experienced what folks call “goose-flesh,” and a tell-tale perspiration moistened my cheeks. I clearly recollect that at the moment I utterly discarded the idea of an intrigue with this noble lady—I was so much her husband’s friend, and she was so imposing.

While matters stood thus, a change was made in the arrangements for our departure. A difficulty arose between M. de Lesdiguières and his agent; it was a dispute of sufficient importance to force him to prolong his stay at Grand-Mesnil by a week or two. It was resolved that I should go alone with his wife. I need hardly say how great was my delight; it was a time to lose one’s wits with joy. But is there any happiness without clouds? The greatest philosophers assure us there is not. As I was going to speak with Lesdiguières in his cabinet, I was very much surprised to hear a woman’s voice utter my name with a sort of vexation. So I stopped

and listened ; and here are the agreeable things that were being said of me.

“ I repeat, Monsieur, that I will not go with M. de Roquelaure.”

“ What a whim ! ”

“ It is no whim, but a serious resolve at which I have arrived after reflection, and which I cannot renounce.”

“ But I don't see . . . ”

“ You don't see—you don't see, Monsieur, that what I am doing is in your interest even more than in mine ! ”

“ In my interest ? ”

“ Certainly ; it would be a fine tale in Paris that Madame de Lesdiguières had returned alone, and that the journey had been a *tête-à-tête* during which she had no other defence than her virtue, and with a man whose name is enough to frighten an honest woman, the Marquis de Roquelaure ! ”

“ But, Madame, it seems to me that your virtue, which you have just mentioned, is a guarantee in which I can trust.”

“ But scandal ! ”

“ Disregard it.”

“ And calumny ! ”

“ Make as light of it as I do.”

“ No, sir ; no,” resumed Madame de Lesdiguières, in a tone of firm conviction, “ I should be compromised.”

"The only women who are compromised," interrupted her husband with some impatience, "are the women who want to be. It is absolutely necessary I should remain here a few days, and since it was your intention to return to Paris, I do not wish to be the occasion of so much deranging your plans. You will travel with Roquelaure, or else I shall think . . ."

"What will you think?"

"That you are afraid of him."

"I? You are joking."

"I am speaking quite seriously. You say he is so formidable."

"I think him ridiculous. I know of nothing in this world," continued Madame de Lesdiguières more vehemently, "more insupportable and wearisome than a professed lady-killer; and the Marquis de Roquelaure is one of those gentry. I can't tolerate him, I cannot look at him, I detest him."

Lesdiguières laughed, and replied:

"The more reason why I should persist in my project; if I were jealous of poor Roquelaure, that would be enough to reassure me. So it's settled, is it not?"

"If I did not wish to return to Paris, I should say decidedly *no*, but . . ."

"You say *yes*, and so much the better," concluded Lesdiguières, who was eager to have done.

I stole noiselessly from the door, and went away to reflect on what I had just heard. The lesson was

an indirect one, but severe, and for a moment it confounded me; but by degrees I collected my wits, recovered my presence of mind, and told myself that after all a solitary opinion ought not to drive me to despair. And suddenly a vague plan formed itself in my thoughts, and I awaited with a certain eagerness the time when I should leave Grand-Mesnil in the company of a woman whom I should have considered a beauty to perfection if she had but been a little more indulgent for me.

Our friend Lesdiguières did everything in exquisite style. At the appointed hour, after a slight collation, of which we partook together, we saw an excellently appointed coach come up to the door, drawn by three fine horses; the duchess entered first, after having formally saluted her husband. I followed her, after receiving from him an accolade, in which I thought I detected (but I was mistaken no doubt) a touch of satire, raillery and slyness.

Here we were, rolling over the high road. I must avow that at first I did not find Madame de Lesdiguières' manner so hard and forbidding as I had feared; but that made little difference to me. I had my plan.

We were seated upon the same seat, side by side, and I took care to withdraw into my place in such a way that my knee should not even touch hers.

The horses were going at a gallop and raised

clouds of dust. I looked with intense interest at the galloping horses and the flying dust.

She asked of me two or three of those little services that people render one another when travelling, and which, though they are unimportant, sometimes serve as pretext for making conversation. I showed the strictest politeness, nothing more.

My tongue was itching to speak, but I had resolved to be silent. I restrained my tongue as I restrained my deportment, my movements, and my whole manner. She at length became weary of this silence, which verged upon being melancholy, and spoke to me of the weather, which was very fine, and of the stars that were showing out in the heavens.

I answered her by a pompous eulogy of her husband. I spoke highly of his economy and excellent management of his affairs. I even made a reckoning of how much hay was required to feed a horse for a year, and drew some very remarkable financial conclusions from my calculation.

She was astounded.

It was evening when we started, and night soon came on. The tender moonlight, which in different circumstances, would have inspired me with fine reflections which I should have endeavoured to impart to my companion, only illuminated a stifled yawn upon my lips.

I saw that she considered me a wonder.

I still had to strike the decisive blow. I withdrew

into a corner, courteously wished her quiet repose, and went to sleep.

The word is not exact—I made a feint of sleeping; at the end of a quarter of an hour I heard her murmur :

“ ’Tis incredible.”

When I opened my eyes again, it was her turn to play the same part, in order to satisfy her *amour propre*; she let her head drop with a swift movement, and regulated her breathing. We kept up the same behaviour all the night; we resembled sailors who take their watch one after another.

When I saw the belfries of Paris appear in the distance, I cried “ Victory ! ” in my mind and sincerely congratulated myself. I had not uttered a compliment to Madame de Lesdiguières, so I had not exposed myself to a lesson or to a refusal; I had not even kissed her hand; it was splendid of me.

The postilion drove us up to her house, and she invited me in with her; I refused politely, stammering some excuses which I took care to make as trifling as possible.

“ Probably you have some pressing visit to make,” she said to me, simpering.

“ I am expected at M. le Prince de Guéménée’s,” I replied, bowing with every sign of profound respect.

And I withdrew full of pride at my conduct, of

which Socrates, or the divine Plato might have boasted.

Such was this journey, which may appear an insignificant incident, but which paved the way for an intrigue, of which we shall speak later. I learned afterwards, that no sooner was Madame de Lesdiguières within her house than she wrote the following letter to her husband:

"I reached Paris in good health, *mon cher Duc*, after the most uneventful, most wearisome and commonplace journey, that can be imagined. *A propos*, I was very much mistaken in your M. de Roquelaure; I had been so simple as to suppose that he was dangerous. How deceptive faces and reputations are! He is but a fool."

As for me, I was not dissatisfied with my journey, for I could very closely guess the effect which my unexpected prudence would have produced upon Madame de Lesdiguières. It will be seen by what happened later, that my stratagem, which consisted in wounding the pride and stimulating the coquetry of the fair, was not so ill devised.

As I had said, my first visit was to Madame de Guéménée. I happened, at the Carrousel, to meet her husband, who was returning from the Prince's where, it seemed, there had been much merriment. M. de Guéménée assured me he had a thousand interesting details to impart to me about

the subjects of the day, and declared he would not let me go till I had supped.

After this meeting, at which the mistress of the house showed herself charming, and made it clear that, like a woman of *esprit*, she had preserved none but favourable memories of the past, we took a the turn in the Palais-Royal, in the hope of meeting a few friends; the first person we encountered was—who would have thought it?—Cardinal Mazarin himself; he was crossing the gardens alone, unescorted, just as some mere abbé in search of a fat prebendaryship might have done. He was bowing to right and to left, and seemed to have no suspicion that he had begun to be unpopular.

The Prince de Guéménée was vexed at this lack of ceremony, and asked me if I did not blame the Cardinal for carrying simplicity and freedom to such an extent.

"Richelieu was the man," he added, "he was great, noble, majestic . . . pikes, halberds and a golden litter; it was admirable."

"You forget," I replied eagerly, "the red robe which did not show the blood; our dear Signor Giulio has not that embellishment to his dress."

"Oh, oh, that's plain enough . . . so you're a Mazarin, my dear Roquelaure?"

"Well, if only not to be too like the others," I answered, smiling.

In spite of all that Madame de Lesdiguières, whom I was far from having pardoned, had said of me, my reappearance in Paris was hailed with almost universal acclamation. I will only speak here of the important circumstances of my return, and will mention that, on the following evening, I joined the *entourage* of the Queen, and found a numerous company, who received me with open arms.

CHAPTER XI

A night with Bois-Robert—Basset—Bad at play—I win ten thousand crowns—Debtor and creditor.

ABOUT this time I was concerned in a little freak at the Abbé de Bois-Robert's. He was, as everyone knows, a good fellow enough, he was an academician without having done much to earn the distinction, and his least disputable characteristic was a strong taste for play. Bautru, with whom I was on very close terms, had one night accompanied me to his house and been very much entertained by following a game of basset, in which fortune was constant to me. Bois-Robert was only a good gamester for a certain time. If fortune turned her back on him for two or three hours running, he would burst out in a cold sweat, make grimaces and bite his lips till they were as white as milk. He said nothing, but it was easy to see that he was swearing to himself and abusing all the saints of paradise under his breath. That evening, I do not know why, but I won continually. Bautru took pity on his sufferings, and wished to stop the play, but I openly set myself against this, saying I wanted to afford Bois-Robert

the chance of recovering what he had lost, as long as ever he cared to take it. Bois-Robert only repeated two words,

“Keep on, keep on.”

And as a matter of fact, we kept on so long and to such purpose, that at the end of the sitting I found I had won not only what he had had before him, but ten thousand crowns on honour.

Everyone had gone, and I had to do like everyone else. I carried off a part of my winnings and withdrew, wishing Bois-Robert every sort of prosperity.

Avarice was no defect of mine, and yet, if I must own the truth, I was highly delighted with my feat. Bois-Robert had amused me by his exclamations and his enraged air; and as, after all, he was a good fellow enough, I should have been glad, in his own interest, to cure him of the bad defect of being a bad gamester. Well, I believe that in such a case, the best plan is to insist on the payment of the debt. The rigorous necessity of a speedy reimbursement gives the loser the pluck he wants for the next contest, and I am, besides, convinced that the luckiest man at play is he who knows how, upon necessity, to pay with the air of a king. As I was thoroughly imbued with this doctrine, I did not give Bois-Robert a moment's respite. I saw that he avoided me, and after that, I sent my servant to him every morning.

My worthy abbé did not know which way to turn, and it was plain that he did not want to pay. All he

did was to send my messengers back to me, bidding them present his compliments, and wish me every happiness and joy in the world; but not a word of the money he owed me. I stuck to claiming my money, and he stuck to evading my claims. One day he even carried his impertinence to the point of replying to my legate that he did not know what I wanted to say to him.

This was too much. I begged Bautru, who had been present at the play, to go and remind him of what he seemed desirous to forget very inappropriately. The appearance of Bautru had an excellent effect on my debtor. He called his gods to witness that he had never meant to scant me of a halfpenny, and that he was ready to discharge his debt of honour, but that being a little pressed at the moment, he begged me to be so good as to give him grace till the next day, that he might make his arrangements and devise a means of settlement. Bautru consented, and went to him again the first thing on the following morning. He was closeted with him nearly an hour, and then he came to me, with the singular overture that follows. I was extremely impatient to learn the result of the interview, and I could not forbear displaying some signs of pleasure when I saw Bautru return.

“My dear Roquelaure,” said he to me, “our poor Bois-Robert is much troubled about the debt he owes you, and begs to propound an arrangement to you

which will suit him perfectly, and, I think, will possibly not displease you."

"Let us see what he offers, *mon cher Bautru*, and be assured that I shall treat you with all the deference due to an ambassador of your value."

"Our good *abbé*," replied Bautru, "is decidedly a little miserly. I have the proof of it before my eyes, but that in no way concerns me, and I am forgetting my duty as an ambassador to play the backbiter. Let us get back to the matter in hand. Bois-Robert has sold old jewels, old lace, old trunks, old gold chains, and everything he could lay his hands on in the way of old-fashioned things for fourteen thousand livres. He must have had plenty to raise such a sum. But it's his all, and he has not a sou of ready money left to dispose of."

"The deuce."

"But," resumed Bautru, with a gesture to show me that I was about to hear the most interesting part of his message, "he offers you in payment of the balance that he will compose an ode in your praise."

I burst out laughing heartily.

"An ode in your praise," continued Bautru, without faltering; "but the worst and dullest that he can."

At these words I looked at Bautru with an expression that seemed to ask if he were laughing at me. He immediately resumed:

"It seems to me that in accepting these terms

I acted as a prudent man and a shrewd diplomatist. When it is known everywhere in our world that Roquelaure made a present of sixteen thousand livres for such a wretched piece of work, no doubt everyone that hears of it will compute what he would have given for a better."

This sally was to my liking, and I laughed again with all my heart; then I told Bautru that he might inform Bois-Robert that the affair was settled as he wished, and that I only begged him to hasten forward the ode in question. The very same day he set to work and was delivered of some fifty very vile verses. The most facetious thing about it all was that Bois-Robert honestly believed he had taken much pains to do them badly, while everyone else was convinced that this much came to him quite naturally. I have kept no copy of the piece, though it cost me the sixteen thousand livres of well and duly gained money. The loss to posterity will not be great, and I for my part feel no regret that it was mislaid.

CHAPTER XII

A little clique—My occupations by day and by night—A word about La Calprenède—The Abbé de Persan's view of him—Il Signor Giulio—My attachment to him—"Les Importants"—My answer to the Marquis de Mortemart—Secret attacks of my enemies—The Prince befriends me—Beaufort's disgrace—He is sent to the Bastille—Mad amours—Madame de Pélussin—Portrait of her—A spot on the sun—An incurable blemish—The Abbé de Cérès's observation—Buquet d'Andail—His avarice—He asks Bautru to dinner—Such a dinner!—The skeleton—What M. Angevins said—A trap—Bautru takes his vengeance in an epigram.

ABOUT the middle of this year, the authority of the new regency might be said to be completely established. And from this time forward it was felt that the germ of those disturbances was working, which were destined some years later, to devastate France so cruelly. The dukes de Mercœur and de Beaufort, sons of M. de Vendôme, had already formed a little cabal the enmity of which seemed scarcely to be feared, but which was continually opposing some obstacle or other to the quiet working of the administration. But I would give the Duc d'Orléans his due, who though he was the only brother of the late king Louis XIII and uncle to

Louis XIV spoke out plainly before the Parlement in favour of Queen Anne,* and thus silenced certain obscure traducers, who had at first sought to reckon him among the malcontents and in the opposition. The Prince de Condé cannot be praised to the same extent, for he seemed only to support the Queen with reluctance, and his aid was not nearly so open and so ready as that of Monsieur.

My real introduction to the Court dates from this year. I was to be seen there from time to time while Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu were alive, but I did not really take my place there till the regency of Queen Anne, whose kindness I shall never forget. Court life delighted me. I was naturally disposed to observation and in no other place should I have found such worthy objects of my curiosity, such food for admiration, and such stimulation to my satiric vein. A little of everything is to be found at Court, the comic and the serious, farces and tragedies. These strange contrasts pleased me. After attending the Parlement to hear the Chancellor Séguier address the Queen-Mother, I took my greatest pleasure, I must avow, in gadding, to collect the daily harvest of facetious tales and little boudoir scandals. I could never devote a whole day to one sole occupation, and when I had passed two or three hours at the Louvre, where I learned, perhaps, that Chavigny had been dismissed the council, or that the finances were taken from the clutching fingers of Boutillier, and had fallen

* Queen Anne of Austria.

into the grasping hands of the Président de Bailleul, I was happy to shake off the dust, as it were, of this grave news and dismiss care by hastening to Scudéry, whose outbursts against Pierre Corneille diverted me greatly, or to see la Calprenède, whose lies and boastings often made us merry.

As I am speaking of la Calprenède it may perhaps be welcome if I give some account of this singular being, who offered a strange instance of real talent united to intolerable failings. I have never seen anybody lie with such impudence and coolness. He was not of Gascon birth for nothing. La Calprenède married Madame de Brac, who had fallen madly in love with him, upon reading his romances, of which the chief, as is well known, are *la Cassandre* and *la Cléopâtre*.

One day, after a representation of "La Mort de Mithridate," which had taken place many years before, the Abbé de Persan had given a certain portrait of la Calprenède, which had an immense success, and which other persons have taken to their own credit since, applying it to other liars.

The "Mort de Mithridate" had just been played, and everyone was giving an opinion of the work.

"It is a remarkable piece," said the worthy academician Conrart, "and la Calprenède is a fellow of good parts."

"Oh, come," said the Abbé de Persan, interrupting him, and shrugging his shoulders, "if he

has any wit, which I donbt, it's only by a slip. Monsieur de la Calprenède—why, his mother slipped him at his birth, he was christened with salt that slipped in as contraband, he slips into obscure lodgings after slipping into society by back-doors, he slips out of one strait into another, and his very voice slips off the notes he tries to sing.

No doubt there was much exaggeration in the abbé's dictum, but it was true in essence.

I will not dwell on the administration of Monseigneur the Bishop of Beauvais; I never had much liking for him, and his tenure of favour was brief. The Bishop of Beauvais was, as a matter of fact, one of the most decisive causes of the promotion of Cardinal Mazarin, for the Queen's favour might at that time, have been compared to a ladder, on which the Cardinal was ascending, while the other was coming down. Besides, it ought not to be forgotten that Richelieu, when dying, had recommended Signor Giulio to Louis XIII, and this impressive patronage was afterwards supplemented by that of M. le Prince and the Duc d'Orleans. Madame la Princesse also openly gave him her patronage. Besides, he tried to deserve the reputation that his friends gave him with one accord, and from this time he showed much eagerness to grant pardons, relieve the unfortunate, and release prisoners. I avow that from this moment, I felt great esteem for Mazarin, I even had affection for

him. His manners formed the strongest contrast with those of his patron, Cardinal Richelieu, and I could not but expect from this circumstance a great advantage to public affairs, and thus my entire devotion was won in his favour. The opposing parties were already organising themselves, though on neither side was it yet suspected that they would ever come to the use of arms. Those wild outbreaks, that were destined to mark the minority of Louis XIII's son, were not yet foreseen, and this melancholy and disastrous era began with insignificant intrigues started at court balls, and with a cloud of slight skirmishes, where the only arms used were wit and satire. The conceit and noisy foppishness of Beaufort and his friends, received a fit chastisement at this time, and that by a single word, which was applied to them by all on our side. They were called *Les Importants*. I recollect that a little while after the fall of Chavigny there was a lively discussion over cards at the Duchesse de Beaufort's, between partisans of Mazarin and the Marquis de Mortemart, a friend of the fallen minister. Both sides grew angry, and, as might be inferred, neither side succeeded in converting the other. However, setting aside all party feeling, no one could have failed to notice the extreme loquacity of M. de Mortemart, which reached such a point, that he would not let his opponents answer him.

I was vexed that I could not take part in the conversation, and I said to the Marquis de Mortemart

that it was not fair he should confiscate the argument to his own advantage, and that there was no chance of getting in a word with him.

"I speak a great deal, but I speak well," he answered me insolently enough.

I did not keep him waiting for his reply, but told him, while I bowed with fitting respect :

"I am with you about the former statement, *cher Marquis*."

Beaufort, who was at the other end of the room and had not mingled with the group in which I was, cast a look sideways at me, that was well adapted to make me feel all the hatred he evinced for me at a later time. I learned that he was on very close terms with Mortemart. As for the latter, he was ready enough to attack, but had neither ready wit, nor sharp answers; he turned on his heel, and pretended he had not heard me. And yet I believe that in his heart he bore me a grudge for it, and was concerned in the effort that certain lords of the Court made later, with the goodwill of the Duc de Saint-Simon, to fasten on me the nickname of Buffoon.

The fact is that I made many enemies by certain biting replies that sometimes escaped me before I sanctioned them. This habit, which carried me beyond the limits that clear reason would have prescribed for me, often was the cause of unsought scandals, at which I was the first to be vexed. At the same time, though I had detractors, I had par-

tisans of value, and one day the Prince replied to some lords or other, who had come to complain to him that my jests showed respect to nothing, and that I treated everything as a laughing-stock——

“Well, gentlemen, it is vain for you to decry Roquelaure for some lively moods that are inherent in his character and make him the most diverting man in France and Navarre. He is more generous than you, for you are somewhat tiresome beyond question, and he has never thought of coming to complain of it to me.”

While these little matters were in progress, the important matters were in progress likewise. Beaufort, who was the most active and the most overbearing of the clique of *Les Importants*, resolved to make a final essay that he might know what he should count on the intention of his enemies about him. He did no less than ask for the Admiralty. This would have been a political favour, and would have given him preponderance in the councils. He was plainly refused the Admiralty, and to complete the humiliation, it was immediately given to the Duc de Brézé, who certainly had more claims to the distinction than all the Beauforts in the world, individually or collectively.

This rebuff brought Beaufort into pitiable notoriety. But this was a small matter. A much more serious event, of which he was taken to be the originator, caused much uproar in the town and great

talk at Court. One fine morning the worthy Parisians learned on awaking that an attempt had been made to assassinate the Cardinal, and the rumour was that M. de Beaufort had prompted this daring step. This made an immense hubbub, as may be guessed, and those worthy cits who had not been very sure of the truth of such a terrible imputation began to believe in it when they learned that Guitaut, the captain of the Guard, had gone to arrest him without ceremony. I was in Anne of Austria's apartments when the mother of M. de Beaufort and his sister, Madame de Nemours, came to the Louvre and threw themselves at the Queen's feet to implore his pardon. I was affected by their tears, and used all my power with the most influential of the *dames d'honneur*, Madame de Hautefort and the Marquise de Sénécé, to gain them the audience for which they supplicated. My entreaties were in vain. They were not received, and some days later the Duc de Mercœur and the Duc de Vendôme were ordered away from Paris.

I bore but little part in the intrigues of that time, and only took advantage of the intervals snatched from war to live well and to live merrily. I have said that constancy was not reputed to be one of my good qualities, and in truth I did all I could to justify the opinion that the sex had formed of me. The year 1643 was one of the best in my life. The laurels I had won at La Marfée and at Honnecourt, though thorns had been mingled in the wreath at

the weaving of it, were now my credentials and warrant, and with a song on my lips I pursued the conquests I had begun sword in hand. I laid my homage successively at the feet of Mesdames de Thilorier, de Fresne, and de Maulévrier, whom I often met when I frequented the Marquis de Gerzay's—a man of inspiring gaiety and a ready tongue. Although I was but twenty-six years of age, I already took love as lightly as any *mousquetaire*, and up and down the world Gaston Jean-Baptiste, Baron de Roquelaure, was spoken of as a dangerous fellow where the bonds of the heart were concerned. However, I must in truthfulness avow that I was sincerely enamoured of Madame de Pélussin, and had great pains in that affair to oust the Prince de Guéménée.

Madame de Pélussin was a true beauty in the antique style. Her dark eyes had an admirable almond shape, and revealed just what they were desired to reveal, which is as much as to say that they were the most indiscreet eyes in the world. The malicious assert that such eyes beg. Her nose, in the Greek style, was fine and regular enough to make Juno faint with jealousy. Her black eyebrows were well spaced, her nostrils were just wide enough, her cheeks were neither fat nor thin, and her complexion was pale, but tinted here and there with pink, and all this made up a charming face. It was crowned by a perfectly moulded forehead that might

be likened to a brilliant and splendid triumphal arch.

And now will you believe, after I have thus unfolded to your eyes the scarcely credible portrait of Madame de Pélussin's charms, that the excellent *ensemble* was disfigured by a blemish which destroyed all its grace and harmony? One blemish, and one only! Is there anything surprising in that? Are there not spots upon the sun? You ask me what blemish could be so serious; and it is true that after the sketch I have given above, the worst painter in the world would find it difficult to perpetrate in the very middle of his canvas a blunder gross enough to destroy the effect of so many lovely and admirable characteristics. But Madame de Pélussin secured this result without aid from anybody. And but a single thing was needed—that she should speak. When she was silent, she was Venus rising from the ocean, or Hero in Leander's arms. But once she opened her mouth there was an end of the bewitching expression which like a humid sun ray had caressed the circle of her adorers from her soft eyes. Her clear glance disappeared, so did the majestic harmony of those features with which a proud fairy might have loved to embellish one of her favourites. How can I express it? She was no longer Madame de Pélussin, and half a score of times I have asked myself while my *liaison* with her was proceeding, whether some malevolent genius did not ravish her from my arms, at the very moment

when I least expected it. All of a sudden she was a different woman. The end of her nose became pinched, she opened her mouth intolerably wide, and two unlucky folds hooked themselves, as it were, to the corners of her eyes. Besides that, she could not even smile without vexing one's ears. So that I used to come to our meetings in the extreme of ardour and leave her half an hour later chilled and discouraged. As long as she said nothing, everything was to my heart's desire. But alas! Madame de Pélussin was a woman, and had a line of little ivory teeth that she delighted to display from time to time. The expression of her face on those occasions, of which silliness was the distinguishing note, had already begun to disgust me with Madame de Pélussin. And now see how frivolous are some of the reasons that determine us in matters of this kind! I came to a decisive rupture with her the day after I had met the Abbé de Cérisy at the Duc de Vendôme's, when he, hearing Madame de Pélussin's beauty extolled, made the remark:

"Oh! yes, certainly she would be a pretty woman, if only she would hold her tongue."

The blow was so heavy and so well directed that it quite disconcerted my affections. However, I believe that my place was not long unoccupied, and that the Prince de Guéménée was from that time happy in the conviction that he had supplanted me. I should have been extremely grieved to deprive him

of the illusion. There must be certain laws of mutual respect among men of fashion.

Some months later a rumour was set on foot that Madame de Pélussin, by a strange freak, had given way to an unbounded passion for one Buquet d'Andail, who was just short of being a man of parts, and had made compilations from certain Latin authors, particularly Seneca and Livy, in which, I have been told, he put as much nonsense as sound observation. But I never believed in this slander. Whatever may have been Madame de Pélussin's faults, she had too much taste to saddle herself with an ape of that kind, for it must be plainly said that this wretched fellow, whose pretensions in letters led him to intrigue for the Academy, was one of the most wearisome and displeasing beings that Satan ever made in his own image. He had red hair and a yellow skin, was almost bald, had the stunted fingers as an attorney, and the flat nose of a clown at a fair. His height was not above four feet three or four inches, and he was slightly hump-backed! As for his character, the depiction of it can be given in a few words. He had a barren mind, exaggerated pretensions in every direction, and the avarice of a Jew. He may have diverted Madame de Pélussin for a time, but I would wager that such a creature never won the favours of a woman, who, in spite of what I have said of her, had a fine feeling of feminine dignity

and knew how to keep her self-respect, whatever happened.

Since I have just mentioned Buquet d'Andail's name, I shall insert a little anecdote of which he was the hero. It is a story of small importance, I avow, but it will serve to display his incredible avarice and give me a chance of repeating a witty answer he had from Bautru.

Buquet d'Andail and he had been long acquainted, but they could hardly be called friends, for their association had begun in some matter of mutual interest that had originated out of the inheritance of an estate in Languedoc. Buquet had not met Bautru for about six months. When he saw him he gave vent to a cry of delight, ran up to him, blocked his way, and cried :

"My dear Bautru, it seems a century since I met you, and I have been wishing for you with all my heart. Now I have got you, and I shall not let you go."

Bautru was a little confused by so impetuous a greeting, and rubbed his eyes to make sure who made the onslaught.

"Ah! so it's you, my dear D'Andail; I thought you were dead. Where are you living now?"

"In Paris; I have made my home here since my wife's death; for I am a widower, my dear friend, I am a widower."

"And that's as much as to say you are a bachelor."

"Just so. Now, my dear Bautru, you must give me a great pleasure."

"What's that?"

"You must come and dine with me."

"Excuse me, my dear friend, but . . ."

"I'll listen to no excuse."

"I assure you . . ."

"I won't hear anything."

"An unavoidable engagement."

"I don't care twopence about that."

"But when I tell you plainly . . ."

"Come," said Buquet d'Andail, gravely, "if you refuse, I shall think we are no longer friends."

"It is not that, but I fear . . ."

"What?"

"To inconvenience you."

"To inconvenience me? You inconvenience me?" said D'Andail, with a mighty laugh. "Why, you are joking. Do you think there can be any talk of *inconveniencing* between comrades? What I offer you, my dear Bautru . . . egad, 'tis with all my heart . . . but I warn you, 'twill be a poor dinner . . . the daily fare of a poor devil like myself has no very strong allurements—it's just pot-luck.

"If I accepted," said Bautru, "that's just how I should understand it, and not otherwise."

"If you persist in disappointing me," replied d'Andail, "I shall think the fear of a bad dinner holds you back."

“That decides me, and I am at your service.”

Buquet d'Andail took Bautru's arm and led him off to the Marais, to a very good lodging he had there, the management of which was entrusted to a housekeeper, who, I think, fulfilled a large number of unexpressed offices for D'Andail. The furniture was clean and pretty, and this satisfied Bautru's practised eye well enough; but the kitchen exhaled no aroma of cooking, a fact that suggested some dark reflections to his mind, since he had made a very light breakfast very early, and certain officious gossips had lately advised him to doubt his host's free-handedness. But the world is so evil, tongues are so ready, and Bautru habitually received with such large reservations the slanders which assailed his ears daily, that he regarded no case as hopeless, and was careful not to show a humour which the result might well fail to justify.

The next indication, the appearance of the housekeeper, would certainly have made anyone but Bautru shudder.

She was called Véronique Buzout, had formerly been servant to an innkeeper at Rouen, and had come to Paris with a certain councillor of the Subsidies' Court, who had been carried off by the small-pox a short time after his arrival. To get a right idea of Véronique, you must imagine a skeleton. Her eyes were sunken, her bones prominent, her head large, her cheeks hollow, her chin pointed, her mouth dry,

her chest angular, her waist shaped like a match, and her hips seemed to have been modelled with a pick-axe; her legs were like a stork's, and she had a deformed foot; her whole person seemed to carry a waft of the graveyard, which depressed the spirits. M. Angevins, certainly one of the merriest and wittiest men I have known, said one day, when he was speaking of Véronique Buzout :

"She is a corpse that has saved itself the cost of a coffin."

In spite of the housekeeper's mournful appearance, Bautru kept up his courage. He was hungry, and his hunger stimulated him. He soon perceived that the table was being laid, and that D'Andail himself was stringently hastening Véronique. So he, too, was in the same case, and everything combined to reassure Bautru. Dinner was served at last.

"What a pleasure it is!" exclaimed Buquet d'Andail, "to dine with a man like you, my dear Bautru—a fellow of wit, no ceremony, and a delightful talker; such a man is a treasure for so modest a host as myself, and I assure you I am infinitely grateful to you, for devoting a couple of hours to me. Pleasant moments are so rare, and pleasant guests so precious . . . Véronique, bring us in something. I'll wager that my good friend here is dying of hunger."

"It's true," said Bautru, "and the keen air . . . and the late hour . . ."

"There, there," said Véronique, in a voice that was quite fitted to her almost ideal contour.

Then it was that Bautru began to tremble for his fate, and certainly the commencement of this memorable banquet gave small promise.

Some water with sorrel in it, which masqueraded as soup, was brought in, in the bottom of a bowl, and proved to have as vile a taste as it had appearance. It was an inscrutable mixture of cloves, grease and burnt onions.

"Wait," said Buquet, "a soup may fail you, without the dinner being abominable. Let us wait."

Bautru waited long. By way of delicacy, D'Andail only offered him an insipid conversation, and a few words with a double meaning, that he generally overworked as jokes. As for the bill of fare, Mademoiselle Véronique successively presented, with a great display of plate, a piece of fresh pork dried in the cooking, a nameless *ragoût* intolerably peppery, and Italian pasties that smelled of the cellar. All this was crowned by a scanty libation of very indigestible and thick Narbonne wine.

After this grotesque meal, the faces of the two partakers offered a striking contrast. Bautru's face was long and grim; but Buquet d'Andail's was bright and joyous.

"What did I tell you," he said, pressing his guest's hand. "Have I made any ceremony? Was there any common sense in your fear of incommoding me? You see I have been quite free and easy."

"That's true," said Bautru.

"It's the right way between friends. Pot luck ! So I hope this will not be the end of it. I shall always be so glad to entertain you. We'll go to work again, whenever you like."

"If I'm to say the truth," said Bautru, vehemently, "I should like to go to work again at once."

Buquet d'Andail understood perfectly well what he meant, but feigned not to see it. His avarice had committed an excess, which his well tested prudence had immediately checked. So he redoubled his antics of friendliness with Bautru, but inwardly resolved never to ask him to supper again. Bautru, for his part, was as happy as a man can be to get out of such an uncomfortable corner, and made a solemn vow that he would never go back to it.

CHAPTER XIII

The posture of affairs—*Ennui*, a malady of pretty women—The cure suggested by Mazarin—An installation at the Palais-Royal—Corneille—Production of *Rodogune*—Madame de Pommeuse—This lady's qualities—Monsieur de Guise, the grandson of Balafre—Marshal the Duke d'Aumont—Mademoiselle de Pons—Huguelin again—Attack and reply—A quarrel at cards—The pack thrown in the face of a player—The duel—An unexpected spectator—I take charge of a pretty girl in a fainting fit—The two wounded combatants—Satisfactory explanations—All ends for the best—Cyrano-Bergerac—A scene from Agrippina—The happy lovers—Villars and Ninon de l'Enclos—D'Aumont cured.

A man never feels in such high spirits as when he is close to a disaster. There is, about the approach of misfortune, something that gets into his head, and makes him deaf to the best advice, and intractable to the plainest warnings. Never had the town and the Court shown themselves more careless and eager for pleasure, than during the two or three years that preceded the Paris libels on Mazarin. I made no exception, and I avow that I, like everybody else, gave scanty attention to the presages of tumult, although the symptoms were very plain and of a nature to make the stoutest hearts anxious.

The early times of the Regency had passed quietly and had offered nothing very remarkable to record. Setting aside certain events, that may be regarded as inseparable from so prompt a change in the destinies of a great kingdom, everything had moved without obstruction, and Paris, Versailles, Ruel and Fontainebleau never ceased to re-echo to the sounds of the gay fêtes and the exquisite balls, at which the Queen-Regent ever shone like a clear and dazzling sun, in spite of her forty years. Everywhere it was a point of honour to hire the fiddles, and from the state rooms of M. le Prince to the house of the least among the ladies of honour, assemblies were the rule, and what we then called "wit offices" were established. The example of the Hotel Rambouillet was contagious.

I could not express how much I was charmed by the Queen Anne of Austria. Her *embonpoint* which has been objected to her beauty, very wrongly to my thinking, was very enticing and agreeably proportioned. Her hair was splendid, and she knew how to pay a compliment in such a way as to give it ten times the value it would have had from other lips. There was something simple and touching in her zeal for the observances of piety, which might have made the most indifferent man of the world love religion. So it will be easily understood how great was our trouble, when at the beginning of the year 1664 we perceived a notable alteration in her Majesty's mien. There were infinite conjectures about the causes of this

change. Those who were least discreet murmured the name of Buckingham under their breath, but twenty other explanations, which it is not worth while to repeat, were in circulation. As a matter of fact, everyone was wrong. Anne of Austria had no serious reason for chagrin. But she was a pretty woman, and her malady was one that is very apt to prey on beauty; she was suffering from *ennui*. Is there any one who, at some time of his life, has not had his heavy hours of deep melancholy and depression? As we know, the possession of supreme authority is no protection against the inroads of human misery. She languished quite seriously, and the prescription which cured her, was discovered by Mazarin. He persuaded her to change her residence. She had caught the indisposition at the Louvre, so she must leave the Louvre and be installed elsewhere. His suggestion found favour. A few days afterwards Anne of Austria entered upon occupation of the Palais-Royal, that graceful and attractive building which Richelieu, at his death, had bequeathed to the late King. Mazarin's idea achieved complete success and he obtained even greater favour by it; and this proves that to arrive at an end, how lofty soever it be, no means must be neglected however petty they may appear.

The Queen-Regent's installation at the Palais-Royal gave a fresh impetus to the strong tendency towards diversions and gaities which was to be found everywhere. As it would soon be my duty to rejoin

the army I fully intended to make the best of my time.

I was very punctual in attendance at the theatre. Corneille was then at his zenith, and all the talk was of a tragedy entitled *Rodogune, Queen of Parthia*, which was very shortly to be given, and was dedicated by the author to the Prince. Sourdis, the Chevalier de Rivière and I resolved to go and see this work at its first performance; and to complete our pleasure on the occasion, we agreed to dine beforehand at La Coiffier's, and go to supper afterwards with Madame de Pommeuse, with whom Châtillon was at that time engaged in an amour.

Corneille had already produced a large number of works, all of which had won the respect of men of perception. His dramatic equipment was very considerable, as will be seen, and of a sort to strike envy into his competitors. We had already had from him *Mélite*, or *Les Fausses Lettres*, *Clyandre*, *La Veuve*, *La Galerie du Palais*, *La Suivante*, *La Place-Royale*, *Médée*, *L'Illusion Comique*, *Le Cid*, *Horace*, *Polyeucte*, *Cinna*, *Le menteur*, and some other pieces, the titles of which escape me at the moment. It may be judged from those I have already cited how difficult we should be to please, for the author had spoiled us. But *Rodogune* was a triumph, and we left the theatre astonished, and, as it were, intoxicated by the play; Madame de Pommeuse had fainted after the last verse, and this had not failed to cause some emotion in the crowd,

though not on me or in several of my friends who were aware that fainting-fits and swoons were as essential to Madame de Pommeuse as her three meals a day. However, this faint was put to the credit of the effect of the play, and Corneille's glory certainly acquired fresh lustre from it that day.

Our minds were still filled with the splendid verses of *Rodogune* when we entered Madame de Longueville's coach; she herself had a violent headache and, with all the will in the world, was unable to come to supper with us. Nevertheless, she insisted on carrying Madame de Pommeuse to her house, and de Vardes and I took advantage of this politeness to mount at once into the coach with the ladies and offer to be their cavaliers.

When we arrived at our destination, we were pleased to see that Madame de Pommeuse, who was of the minor Provincial nobility and was only beginning to be seen at Court, seemed desirous to do things in grand style, and keep her house on a fine footing. We were delighted, for agreeable places of assemblage had begun to be scarce, since political dissension had been secretly undermining the bases of our society. Besides, Madame de Pommeuse had made a choice of guests that displayed her prudence and good taste; she was a widow, who knew how to profit and let others profit by this title, sometimes so much coveted, and we soon recognized that, in spite of two or three little foibles that are inseparable from feminine vanity,

we had in her as delightful and amiable a hostess and entertainer as could be found in a world where so many people aim at entertaining without knowing the first principles of that great art. So, setting aside the absurdity of her fainting fits, she was a charming woman.

I am making mention of this first reception at Madame de Pommeuse's because several rather singular scenes took place there ; although they do not concern me personally, I think they will be found no less interesting on that account ; and they will afford the opportunity of making the acquaintance of various persons who were of importance at that time and stood upon the top steps, as it were, both in the town and at Court.

Madame de Pommeuse had arranged that everybody should arrive shortly after our return from the play. One after another, we saw the following guests arrive in attire that showed we were to expect the fiddles—M. de Guise, the exquisite of the time, a veritable Amadis of the Court and grandson of le Balafre, Marshal d'Aumont, captain of the body-guard, Ménage, de Bois, Sazzarin, the doctor of divinity and mediocre rhymester, M. de Montereul, of the Academy, and Huguelin, an idiot of whom I have made previous mention. Among the women were to be seen Mademoiselle de Pons, who afterwards married the Marquis d'Heudicourt, Madame de Catelan, Madame d'Ecquevilliers, Mademoiselle de

Leuigny, and many others whose names I do not recall.

Everyone seemed well attuned for amusement and their reception by the mistress of the house could but confirm this excellent inclination. The scraping of the bows was soon heard, but in the meanwhile, a man had been announced whom I had never seen and whose strange freaks of character then formed the staple of many conversations. I allude to M. de Cyrano-Bergerac. He was a witty Gascon, born in 1620, and had for some time served in the regiment of guards. This singular person had made a good enough soldier, for he had been present at various sieges, where he had been many times wounded, but one fine day he had been seized with an invincible dislike to the career of arms and had become a writer. He sought his inspiration in nature alone and gained from her more than one idea free from all resemblance to those which his contemporaries turned to account. I was delighted by the chance which brought me into his company and I resolved if the opportunity occurred, to become acquainted with him.

De Vardes, who was at that time turning his attention to Madame de Laval, opened the dance with her. She was an agreeable woman, who had but one fault—that of being a little too much talked about. But De Vardes did not trouble himself about this.

Play commenced at the same time as the dancing,

and this gave rise to an incident which fitly ushered in the series of very diverse excitements amidst which the night was to close. I was playing piquet with Ménage, and seeing that I had thrown out a king, which in the position in which we were, would at once have won me the hand, I exclaimed, as I cast a card upon the table :

“ I have lost, and lost by my own fault. It must be owned I am a very *Huguelin* ! ”

As a fact, I did not think the worthy Huguelin was so close to me, or I should assuredly have restrained my tongue. But misfortune would have it that he was just behind my chair.

“ You are a fool,” said he to me, for he was mad with rage.

“ That is just what I meant,” I replied without hesitation.

The disproportion of age prevented any other kind of encounter between myself and the worthy Huguelin, and for that matter his foolishness had passed into a proverb, but he was received in the best company, as I think I have already said, by reason of his enormous fortune and his strong financial relations. I know not if he understood the meaning of my answer, but I am inclined to think he did not, for he threw himself into a chair and sat well back in it, puffing with importance and fingering his shirt frill with the most insolent and self-satisfied air. Long-continued laughter greeted this interchange

of shots, in which it was but a slight merit in me to have the best of it, if my opponent's weakness is considered.

But this was nothing in comparison with what happened later, when the room in which we sat became the scene of a remarkable adventure. Here is an account of it :

The Duc de Guise and Marshal d'Aumont had been seated at play together for about half-an-hour, and there was nothing to show that any sentiment existed between them other than such as would naturally animate two gentlemen of family, opposed at cards, but united by the bond of equal nobility and loyalty. However, the further the play went, the more obvious became a veiled hostility between the two players. They could not finish a hand without disputing, nor mark a point without raising objections. To anyone who saw them thus keen at their play and quivering with anger at each dispute they originated, they would have seemed the two greatest grabbers of stakes that could be imagined, but Heaven knows that neither Guise nor D'Aumont ever showed much of that vile blemish.

What, then, was the meaning of their threatening gestures and their angered tones? Had the passion of gambling, a passion which ought to be represented as lacking eyes and ears, on a sudden won two fresh votaries in them? Certainly not. For the cards had very little to do with the respective feelings of the two

champions, and the end of this narrative will scatter any doubts that may be felt on this head.

Madame de Pommeuse was discharging her duties as hostess to the very best of her powers, and the fiddles were making a great din, when on a sudden the Duc de Guise rose from the table and threw his cards in Marshal d'Aumont's face, exclaiming :

"'Fore gad, sir, if a man sits to play, he should know how to lose. Your incessant grumbling annoys me, and I desire satisfaction for it."

The Marshal also rose, but more slowly, and without losing anything of his self-possession, he replied very quietly :

"Your action, M. le Duc, is not that of a gentleman. You may throw your cards in the face of a yokel, but when a man is called D'Aumont and carries a sword against his left side he tries to offer an unsullied escutcheon to his adversary, and it is well not to dishonour by the act of a coxcomb the blood which may at any moment become the stakes in an affair of honour."

"You might have dispensed with the lesson," said Guise proudly.

"And you might have dispensed with the insult, Monsieur. Follow me."

The consequence of such a scene is easily guessed. Guise and D'Aumont hurried out, followed by four gentlemen who had been witnesses of the incident, and could not therefore avoid becoming witnesses of

the ensuing encounter. An interchange of glances had sufficed for an understanding, and each one took his side with one or other of the opponents. Villars, then enamoured of Ninon de l'Enclos, and D'Epernon declared in favour of the Duc d'Aumont; I joined with M. de Chevreuse for the Duc de Guise.

When we reached the park, on which the moon was then shedding its brightest rays, we thought they would draw without further explanation, and that it would be a matter of five minutes at the most. But, contrary to our expectation, M. de Guise, before taking sword in hand, turned to his seconds and said :

"Gentlemen, I thank you for the regard you show for me. You declare yourselves my seconds, and yet, according to appearances and from the point of view of strict conduct, I was wrong—completely wrong. As M. d'Aumont has very well said, a man may throw his cards in the face of a yokel, but must not throw them in the face of a gentleman. What I did was unworthy of me, especially if I were prompted by some wretched gambler's motive, as by a low and childish jealousy about an ace of hearts or a knave of clubs. Happily it is no such matter, and if these gentlemen will allow me, I will explain myself clearly to M. d'Aumont."

The latter hereupon approached, and the Duc de Guise spoke as follows :

"I was very little interested in the game of piquet, as you must have perceived by five or six blunders

that I certainly should not have made had I been in my usual mood. But behind me, sir, outside the room in which we were, there was an object on which your eyes were incessantly fixed . . . and since my heart is deeply engaged with her whom you dared to gaze at with so much insolence, I could not restrain an action which I regret, though the consequences of it will rejoice me, as I shall thus be able to risk my life for the lady of my thoughts and at the same time to avenge certain insulting rumours, which I have reason to believe you are very well acquainted with."

D'Aumont replied with his habitual phlegm :

"You mean to allude to Mademoiselle de Pons?"

"You have guessed exactly," exclaimed Guise, growing paler.

"And, by what you say," answered D'Aumont, "I am to be reproached with these innuendoes by which the honour of that noble lady is gravely called in question?"

"Those words are a fresh insult to her . . . and I demand silence of you."

"I have to clear myself of an odious accusation, and I must continue," said D'Aumont, unmoved. "Learn, Monsieur le Duc, that though I have not reached the height which you boast to have attained in matters in gallantry, I may take to my credit some conquests on the battle-field of love. Well, I defy anyone in the world to show that I have ever been so unworthy as to expose the name of one of my dear

victims to the blasts of hazard or try to dress up the thorny crown of a rebuff as a laurel wreath of triumph. I have applied myself first and foremost to be modest and discreet. As for Mademoiselle de Pons, is it true that I ever sighed for her, that my advances were met, and that I surrendered to her beauty? Even if all this were not false, I should still deny it, and I have only to tell you, Monsieur le Duc, that when just now you uttered the name of a woman that you pretend to honour before these four gentlemen, who are in no way concerned with her, you were only guilty of a fresh impertinence and another piece of cowardice."

At these words they drew their swords, and the clicking of the metal began. It was high time, for these long challenges were too redolent of the "Iliad" of Homer, and in general an encounter in the French style has no preface of such length. For the rest, I do not remember during all my life having been present at so fierce and determined an affair. A singular contrast was to be observed between the opponents. Guise fenced with the most vigorous impetus. He attacked and lunged with such fury that at each instant it seemed he would run his adversary through. D'Aumont, on the other hand, gave way from time to time, but regained his ground with unrivalled skill, and he also delivered thrusts which would have delighted the master-at-arms of the Mousquetaires. Nevertheless, matters advanced no further. Neither

D'Aumont nor Guise had the advantage, and it would have been very difficult to say which of the two would be master of the field.

While the matter stood thus, we heard a rustling of the foliage at some distance, and the combatants stopped with one accord. I ran in the direction whence the noise had proceeded; and a minute later, aided by one of the moon's brightest rays, I returned to tell my friends that I had recognised, beyond all doubt, Mademoiselle de Pons herself. She had, in fact, been rendered anxious by the scene at the card-table, the hidden sense of which she had apparently understood and she had stolen alone from the *salon* and had come to learn the results of the incident with her own eyes, prompted by curiosity or whatever other sentiment may be supposed.

"We cannot put the affair off," said M. de Guise eagerly. "I think that M. d'Aumont will agree with me."

"Certainly," answered d'Aumont, bending his blade negligently as it rested point to earth, "the sport is too good to be left unfinished. What are we to do?"

"What are we to do?" echoed Chevreuse and Villars.

"My dear Roquelaure," resumed Guise, pressing my hand, "will you do me a service?"

"Ten, if you like. Do we keep account of them?"

"Chevreuse will suffice for me. Go and meet

Mademoiselle de Pons ; try to make her listen to reason ; tell her she is wrong to be anxious about what is going on here, and that she has nothing to fear. In a word, tell her anything you like, provided she does not come hither, but returns instantly to the *salons* . . . And in Heaven's name be quick, my dear Roquelaure."

I raced away in the direction that the sounds had indicated, and in my ardour I leaped the little murmuring streamlets, and jumped the artificial rocks with which the surface of the park was sprinkled, and I even trod on and wrecked two or three handsomely laid-out flower-borders. And I may say without too much exaggeration, that I was at the girl's side in a single bound. Her pallor was quite terrifying.

When she saw me, she uttered a cry of joy and exclaimed :

"Where is he ? Where is he ? Tell me where he is, Monsieur de Roquelaure, tell me ! "

"Of whom are you speaking ? "

"Do you not know ? Of M. de Guise . . . He came out to fight with M. d'Aumont. Do not deceive me. Is this horrible duel finished ? "

"Mademoiselle," I replied in great embarrassment, "I do not know what to tell you. MM. de Guise and d'Aumont are engaged upon an explanation, and even though an encounter between them be probable, yet it is always possible they may arrive at an understanding."

"Impossible!" she cried. "The door of the room in which the quarrel took place was half opened and I alone was in such a place that nothing which took place escaped me. I saw the insult . . . it is one which calls for bloodshed . . . and M. de Guise will not draw back. He will be killed, sir; even now while I am speaking to you he is doubtless slain."

"Why entertain so horrible a thought? The matter in hand is a dispute at play—a trifle."

"I—I am the subject of the quarrel," cried Mademoiselle de Pons, in a voice full of anguish and conviction. M. de Guise loves me, I know it . . . the slanders that have been spread about me, because of a few attentions from M. d'Aumont, have reached his ears, as they have reached the ears of so many, and they are two eager rivals who will fight without remorse till the ground is stained with blood. Let me go to them . . . I want to separate them."

"I pray you to be more reasonable, Mademoiselle. When two men are at swordplay they do not wish to be disturbed, and a petticoat is never welcome at that kind of dance. You would spoil everything."

"I tell you I can prevent their fighting."

Let a man be as strong as he will, it is no easy matter to restrain a light, slight and adroit nymph, who has made up her mind to escape. The nervous suppleness and liteness of her movements are, in certain circumstances, better weapons than the best trained male vigour. Mademoiselle de Pons slipped from my grasp as

swiftly as a bird, a shadow, or a fish could have done. I set off in pursuit of her, as may be guessed, following in her very steps. We made a rapid run of it; for one might have thought she had wings, and hardly touched the earth with her little feet. Unfortunately for her, as we came to the angle of a walk that gave a view of the clear space where the combatants were, she perceived that which suddenly overwhelmed her spurt of strength and alacrity. She lost her power, passed her hand before her eyes, as if to repel the darkness that was descending on them, and would have fallen if I had not been there, at the opportune moment, to support her.

I peered to see what had frightened her so much, and perceived that nothing was yet done. MM. de Guise and d'Aumont were working like clockwork and neither yet had a decided advantage; but the blades shone and flashed, and the sight of this had been enough to make the poor girl, unused to such sport, lose consciousness.

Her fainting-fit put her in my power, and this time I did better with her little person. I carried her briskly into a little thicket where I could put her on a bank of turf. And it was not long before she regained complete possession of her faculties and her first thought was to learn the result of the duel. I knew no more than she about this. She was convinced that since she had lost so much time some irreparable disaster would occur, and growing more and more anxious

was eager to start running a second time to the place of the meeting.

Then all of a sudden we heard a hubbub on the other side of the foliage, and we stepped forth.

M. d'Aumont had been wounded in the thigh, and was being carried off by his two seconds, who had contrived a litter with branches of trees. M. de Guise was following them, busied with stanching the blood from a slight wound on the wrist with his handkerchief.

Upon seeing this, Mademoiselle de Pons could no longer restrain herself, but ran up to him and cried, with a sort of delirium that was very foreign to the reserve which is obligatory upon her sex :

"It is you . . . it is you ! God be praised. I have suffered terribly."

Even if he had felt no love for her, Guise would have been the most ungrateful man in the world if he had not been deeply touched by this manifestation of affection. He knelt before the beautiful maid who had just let her secret escape her so imprudently, and said to her in an impassioned tone :

"Mademoiselle, I owe the choicest pleasure of my life to this wound. Without it, I might always have remained unhappy ; but a word from you has just assured me of happiness for ever."

"Monsieur le Duc," stammered Mademoiselle de Pons "perhaps I have overstepped the bounds which prudence ordains, but do not make me repent it. You

know that at Court an ill-considered word is at once repeated and so often misinterpreted . . .”

“If any man dares attack you,” replied the Duke hotly, “if any man dares, all those who have the hardihood to share in such a piece of infamy, shall know the weight of this sword.”

“Sometimes you are too quick to draw it,” said Mademoiselle de Pons, interrupting, “as the encounter to-night shows.”

“It was necessary.”

“It was vain.”

“Was it not right I should defend you?”

“Defend a woman’s reputation in that way? Why, do you not rather harm it? What was the wrong M. d’Aumont had done? Had he spoken of me?”

“No, assuredly,” said M. de Guise with some hesitation, but has not his name been coupled with yours during the last six months in a thousand tales in which your honour is basely compromised?”

“To prove how ingenious slander sometimes is, and how much deceived one may be in such matters, I wish to have an explanation at once with M. d’Aumont.”

“For what purpose?”

“To justify myself . . .”

“With what view? Have I harboured any suspicion against you?”

“Yes . . . for you love me . . . at least, I think so.”

"Indeed I love you."

"And so you are jealous. Well, I want to cure you of this jealousy. Besides, you owe reparation to poor M. d'Aumont, and I am sure that you will not refuse it at my request."

"Reparation? Explain, Mademoiselle—reparation . . . for what?"

"For your mistake."

"And in what way, supposing there has been a mistake, am I to repair the damage I have done?"

"By making excuses to him . . ."

"I? To him?"

"You have nearly killed him."

"But I could not make excuses."

"I wish it."

Mademoiselle de Pons' voice, as she uttered these last words, was at once so tender and so commanding that Guise felt compelled by it. He followed her mechanically, and in a few minutes we had overtaken Villars and d'Epernon who were carrying the wounded man off with all sorts of precautions. I came up with them first and begged them, if M. d'Aumont's condition allowed of it, to halt for a moment. It was the injured man himself who gave me my answer.

"Willingly," said he. "What is wanted of us? Are we to take the good sword in hand again? Very well, we shall still manage to stand up and front our adversary. . . ."

"There is no further question of that," I replied, smiling; "what is asked for is a verbal explanation that a lady wishes to have with you."

"A lady," said D'Aumont, cocking his moustache; "and who is the lady, my good Roquelaure?"

"The lady . . ."

"Ah, pardon, before you tell me her name, is she pretty?"

"Charming."

"In that case, tell me frankly if I am presentable. I think the slashes of my sleeves are disordered, and I fancy the ribbons at my knees are untied . . . yes; Villars, fasten them . . . and this lace, d'Epernon, I beg you to give it a better appearance, and make it hang more comely . . . that's it . . . thanks . . . we were saying, my good Roquelaure, that her name is——?"

"Mademoiselle de Pons."

"She in person! the very subject of our quarrel. Ah! why did not you say so . . . quick, quick, I am ready . . . Is not this wound worth more in her eyes than the finest garb imaginable?"

"Here she is," I said, interrupting him, and then I fell back several paces.

Mademoiselle de Pons was much disturbed. However, she succeeded in showing some self-possession, and said in a very clear voice :

"Monsieur le Duc, you will easily believe me when I assure you that I am profoundly grieved at what

has overtaken you on my account ; but will this assurance suffice to gain for me the favour that I have come to ask of you ? ”

“ The pain I suffer would be nothing,” replied the Duc d’Aumont gravely, “ if I had really deserved it, and if the reports that have been set on foot about me were true. Unhappily . . . ”

“ Be generous to the end, Monsieur le Duc, and gather your self-possession to hear the avowal I am about to make to you.”

Hereupon Mademoiselle de Pons lowered her voice slightly, and continued, not without blushing:

“ I love M. de Guise . . . and I would not for the world that he should keep in his mind the slightest suspicion about my past life. It has been said that I have encouraged your attentions, incited your addresses, and favoured your suit. I conjure you, in the name of honour, to say if this is true or false.”

M. de Guise, who had remained a little way behind, drew up, and M. d’Aumont directed a glance at him which was accompanied by a smile.

“ Ah ! I see ; I am asked for a confession, and here is the priest who is to receive it. Well, this wound of mine may carry me a long way, and it is a good thing to fulfil one’s duty like a loyal gentleman and a true Christian. My dear De Guise,” he continued, stretching his hand out to him with cordiality, “ since this lady loves you, I pardon you

your anger and the outburst to which it led; and I am not even angered over the *coup de tierce* that you bestowed upon me, for in cold blood, and before we faced each other, I could not, without endangering my honour, have made the declaration to you that you are now to hear. It would have been almost cowardice. Where men like ourselves are concerned, the fighting comes first, and the explanations afterwards."

"Well?" said M. de Guise, who began to grow impatient.

"Well," replied D'Aumont, "the thing is quite simple and natural. Upon my honour and before God, if I have ever aspired to the affections of Mademoiselle de Pons—and I owe it to no man to render account of that—she knew nothing of it; so I am inclined to think that my love for her, if it ever existed, made no breach in her heart, my dear De Guise, that you need exercise yourself or complain about. . . . Besides . . ."

"Enough," said the Duke, closing the wounded man's mouth. "Do not increase my confusion, and let us not do this fair lady the wrong of supposing that she was seriously suspected. I never gave credit to those foolish slanders, and my anger just now ought only to be attributed to the ingrained petulance of a character that is . . ."

"A little too pugnacious," said Villars, by way of conclusion; it was plain he was eager to finish

the scene. "But I think this makes enough talk and explanations of that kind; D'Aumont requires rest . . . D'Epernon is going to take him home in his coach. Mademoiselle de Pons will be so good as to return to the *salons* on Roquelaure's arm, and he will take care to look as if nothing had happened. Guise, to avoid suspicions, will only return in about an hour . . . and as for me . . ."

Here Villars paused in a manner which betrayed the man who has wandered into an indiscreet remark, and seeks a lie to get out of it decently.

"You," I said to him, taking him aside, "you are going to leave this house mysteriously to go . . . I know well enough whither . . ."

"And whither, then, Roquelaure, the deuce take you? For to hear you a man might think you had learned sorcery, and were inspired with secret knowledge."

"Judge for yourself. You are going where Saint-Étienne, the Chevalier de Barai, Châtillon, Sévigné, Miossens, and many others went before you . . . to Ninon de l'Enclos. You see we know your pranks. Have I said right?"

"I don't know."

"Am I a liar?"

"You are the devil!"

We followed the advice of Villars in all particulars. We got D'Aumont away by a side gate of the garden; and the only difficulty was that which I

had in separating De Guise and Mademoiselle de Pons, who could not easily be persuaded to leave one another so soon. The first declarations of love are generally of an intolerable length.

When we re-appeared in the midst of the company at Madame de Pommeuse's, the circumstance did not produce the ill-effect we had had reason to fear. There was so crowded an assembly that our absence had scarcely been remarked. Besides, attention was centred upon an interesting object. Cyrano-Bergerac, in response to the requests that were pressed upon him from all sides, had made up his mind to read a fragment from his tragedy of *Agrippina*. No doubt, M. de Cyrano cannot be compared to Pierre Corneille, and I have not the qualities which would be needed to establish their respective merits; but I think the genius of this author was no barren ground, as has been asserted, and that if early death had not stopped his career his genius would have thrown out rich and abundant shoots. His character pleased me infinitely. The original bent of his ideas, his perpetual freaks, his sallies, his careless disposition, and his keen wit, contributed not a little to make me regard him with favour.

Here, in a few lines, is the argument of the passage which Cyrano recited to us. Livilla, daughter-in-law of Tiberius, has entered into a conspiracy with Sejanus against the life of the

emperor ; but, having discovered that Sejanus was deceiving her with false promises, and really entertained for Agrippina, the widow of Germanicus, the love he affected to feel for her, she has resolved to bring vengeance on his treachery, and to attain this end has revealed the plot to Tiberius. Death will soon overtake Livilla for this information, but she consoles herself by thinking of the dread punishment in store for Sejanus.

Silence was secured, and Cyrano-Bergerac recited from memory the following scene :—

Now on your ruin's brink, not Cæsar's love,
Nor Agrippina's, nor the people's voice,
Crying their interest through thee, nor all the strength
Of this our faction, though Rome's eagle shook
In fear of it, can buy thee back this life,
Nor shield thy head from that loud, angry thunder
My vengeance hath evoked ; thy death is sworn.
Livilla undertook it, and a woman
Hath wrought this height of statecraft.

SEJANUS.

Seeing the law of Hymen was to join us,
I should have known my fate. Thou art too skilful
In losing husbands ; he takes the hand of death
Who takes thy hand as wife.

LIVILLA.

Yet thy love taught me
The crime I hate and do ; who can be innocent
And love one guilty ? Villany and I
Were never friends, till I made play with vileness
To link my lot to thine. But thou shalt wed not
Livilla 'gainst thy will, nor Agrippina.

She shall not be your wife. Since I avail not
To quench thine ardour for her but by ending
The life that harbours love for her—thy life,
I chose to call the hour of death upon me,
And drag thee with me from the light ; lest thou
Shouldst say that thou wast happy in her arms.

SEJANUS.

Thou thinkest death adds weight to my despair ;
But death protects me, blots thee from my sight ;
He severs us, so cannot make me tremble.

LIVILLA.

False is thy hope, as false hath been thy love ;
We shall set out together, and unbroken
Will be our chain, for Fate will lengthen it
To give to Death's divulsion. We shall go
Linked into Hades ; they know not pity there.
Therefore my shade, for ever linked to thine,
Shall weary out thine eyes with circling thee,
And meet thy glance that idly turns away ;
We start from life together, and my blood
Will make one stream with thine, its rills a-fire
Will mingle so in one with thine confusedly,
Unitedly, that Fate among the dead will take this ardour
To be of both our lives, of one joint life,
And treat our souls as one.

Cyrano was a master of declamation, and this added to the effect that such a vigorous vein of poesy produced. He was much applauded, and I myself congratulated him with all my heart.

Madame de Pommeuse's admirable fête lasted till late in the night. There was music, and we danced, and a midnight supper was served. Made-

moiselle de Pons and M. de Guise devoured each other with their eyes.

Madame de Pommeuse did the honours of her house so well that night, that everybody stayed till the last moment—everybody except Villars, who, as I had clearly divined, went to await the day at the Marais, with the fair Ninon de l'Enclos.

D'Aumont was carried to D'Epernon's, and on the following day to his own house. He kept his bed more than a fortnight, being taken with a fever, which caused some anxiety to his friends, for his wound was of a serious nature. But happily it did not become inflamed, and under the care of the learned M. Guesnault, doctor at the Hotel de Condé, he was soon upon his legs again. Guise and he were afterwards the best friends on earth.

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CHAPTER XIV

Three Months at Grand-Mesnil—M. de Magnancourt's mania—The fearful consequences that sometimes ensued from it—His scheme about me—Mademoiselle Thérèse d'Oysanville—A faithful sketch—The word marriage—Perturbing effect of it on me—M. de Magnancourt's efforts—The love of liberty—A serious communication—An avowal by deputy—What is to be done?—Embarrassment—I resolve on a grievous sacrifice—Sinister joy of the schemer—An interview secured with difficulty—Sad figure cut by the two lovers—A new kind of declaration—Mutual satisfaction—A vow of friendship—M. de Magnancourt owns he is beaten—Concerning the contradictory tendencies in love—Judicious reflections on this point—The mystery of the heart.

ABOUT the middle of the summer I returned to M. de Lesdiguières at his pleasant country house of Grand-Mesnil. There I met a certain M. de Magnancourt, whom I have never forgotten. It is true I have my reasons for remembering him.

M. de Magnancourt was afflicted with an extremely dangerous madness, and I very narrowly escaped falling a victim to it. He was an obstinate and tyrannical old man, who had no other pleasure on earth but concocting marriages. Let a man be fair or dark, gentle or simple; let a maid be noble or of low degree, it mattered not; all was fish that

came to his net, provided he had someone to marry. He got me to his house at Grand-Mesnil, where he was M. de Lesdiguières's neighbour, under the most specious pretexts ; but in reality he was plotting against my liberty, and a little more and I should have been caught in the trap.

This same M. de Magnancourt had, according to report, contrived the marriage of Mademoiselle Bigot de la Honville with Gondran, and certainly this example was not encouraging to people, for Madame de Gondran furnished as much occasion for gossip as any lady in France. It was the same with the De Bonnetière couple, who lived at Angers, and who, a week after the nuptial blessing had been pronounced over them in church, diverted the whole town by their furious quarrels which began inside the house and ended in the street.

The person whom M. de Magnancourt had selected for me was a Mademoiselle d'Oysanville, the daughter of a gentleman of Normandy, who had a large property at Alençon. She lived with her father in a château about a gunshot distant from le Mesnil and Madame de Magnancourt, who was a woman without a will of her own, and had not the energy to approve or blame her husband, let him gratify his mania without let or hindrance.

. Old Magnancourt at length succeeded in fixing my attention on Mademoiselle d'Oysanville, though I was very little inclined to gratify his whim. She

was not badly made. She had a graceful form, a sweet expression, and very regular features, which, however, lacked animation. She had a charming mouth, bright eyes, evenly tinted cheeks, and a complexion void of high colouring. These traits composed indeed an agreeably painted mask of delightful proportions ; but there was not enough movement of the blood in her still veins, and the passions were not alive under the cold white envelope which presented all the qualities of a marble statue from the hands of as clever a sculptor as can be imagined.

So much for her exterior ; now to consider her mind.

There was nothing unusual in Mademoiselle d'Oysanville's character, though it gave evidence of great frankness, naturalness and sprightliness. She spoke little, though her imagination was well enriched, and perhaps this was due to the difficulty she sometimes seemed to find in expressing herself. In a word she was a quiet girl, free from violence of disposition, who controlled her actions, and while she was no doubt willing to learn everything, as yet actually knew nothing.

As for the particular bent of her thoughts, I discerned this after two or three meetings, and I know not why it failed to dispose me in her favour . . . Incredible as it seems, Mademoiselle d'Oysanville, who had a dowry of a hundred thousand crowns, without reckoning expectations, Mademoiselle d'Oysanville

was economical. Thrift was her favourite virtue, and she managed to bring it in everywhere. I heard her, *à propos* of an event which turned the conversation in this direction, blame the profusion of the spendthrift, the vanity of mirrors, the uselessness of splendid upholstery, and the unseemliness of canopied bedsteads. She would scarcely consent to adorn herself with lace and ribbons, and her costume was of a simplicity hardly consistent with her rank. But I must repeat that avarice had nothing to do with all this, and that her excellent heart never recoiled from an expense, however great it were, which was called for to solace misfortune.

So there were two ways of regarding this peculiarity of her character. In the eyes of some it might pass for a blemish, in the eyes of others for a high virtue. In this case, the question was what I myself thought of it.

And, before I proceed, I must state a fact. The first time that M. de Magnancourt sounded that terrible word "marriage" in my ears I experienced emotions which I shall, perhaps, find it difficult to make the reader understand. A sort of inarticulate clamour arose in my brain and stupified me strangely, while a cloud of unsteady vapour stretched before my eyes. Marriage! This combination of letters, this grouping of syllables, seemed like a foreign word to me, and I begged M. de Magnancourt to repeat it a second and a third time to me. I heard well

enough, but scarcely understood. The old gentleman made no difficulty about giving me every explanation and supplying all the information of which I appeared to stand in need. He was a past master in the subject in hand, and could have written a complete treatise on matrimonial obligations and marriage contracts. Nothing would have been lacking, neither the rules for pursuing the fair, nor the agreement of the parties, nor an indication of the respective duties of the husband and the wife on the night of the great undertaking and ever afterwards. I should further say that he did not want eloquence, and if he did not altogether bring me to his way of thinking, at least he made me listen to him. He was zealous about it. Every other day he gave a ball at his little château, and arranged that Mademoiselle d'Oysanville should, quite naturally, be the queen of the evening. And there was no end to his diligence with me. He always put me next to the lady, persuaded her to take me as her cavalier, and managed that we should be alone together now and then. To do him justice, I must own that so much trouble was not merely thrown away. A spark does not fall upon straw without effect, and my heart, as has been seen, was only too inflammable. Though there was no sort of apparant understanding between Mademoiselle d'Oysanville and myself, for we had been alone together very little, and her quiet and studiously

guided character was not to my taste, things seemed to be moving by the mere force of an impulse which we ourselves neither aided nor checked, and M. de Magnancourt rubbed his hands merrily.

Nevertheless, at times I itched to have done with the happiness, so far very problematical, which the architect of my new passion was always depicting in the most flattering and attractive way. The spirit of rebellion took possession of me when I was alone. Then I would tell myself that I was free in my movements, free to speak or be silent, that my will was unfettered, and that it was an exquisite delight to be able—when I chose, and without having to trouble myself about any person's interference—to go out or stay at home, chatter or be mum, just as freely as if I had been one of the gods of Olympus or the king of creation. Was the Sultan in the midst of his harem, or the king of Spain in the midst of his court, happier than I? I was as free as the wind, as fickle as a butterfly, and as capricious as a bird. What better could I hope for? To be five-and-twenty and feel free of heart and hand—can any joy on earth be more perfect, or any dream surpass this reality? To rise at dawn, or when the sun has already made a good third of his course, to select the clothes that best please one, to put on the brown velvet cloak or the green, according to the weather and one's liking, to eat heartily or go fasting, to turn to the right when one is tired of keeping to the left, in a word, only to follow the

guidance of a will at once variable and absolute—is not this an admirable life, wild enough and charming enough to put you out of liking with all others? That was what I used to repeat to myself when I was given over to my solitary thoughts, that is to say, when M. de Magnancourt granted me a truce, not for a day indeed, nor for an hour, but for a few minutes. At those moments my independence and my rebellion were sublime. I relentlessly broke the fine invisible chains that were sought to be imposed upon me, in the midst of which I felt myself becoming a slave, though they were no more solid than a spider's web. If the enemy had not returned seasonably to the charge, my swift and early triumph would certainly have cut the struggle short.

Unfortunately there is nothing so obstinate as an old man, and M. de Magnancourt was not one to abandon an idea that he had fully resolved to realise. Nothing sufficed to stop him. Like an old pilot, he made his way against wind and tide. So one day—and I suspect that this time he was alive to my hesitation—he took me apart and spoke with me to the following purpose;

“Well, my dear Roquelaure, are you resolved?”

“To what?”

“To be united, I mean.”

“Oh, oh! that depends how you take it.”

“I take it in the right way.”

“Still, it is a thing to reflect on.”

"Not at all, it's pressing."

"Not on my side."

"Perhaps. But it's different with the other."

"Why? Do you want to make a coxcomb of me?"

"It would be a pity, and yet . . ."

"I should have some reason for being one?"

"Ah! well, I don't know."

As he uttered these words, M. de Magnancourt took, designedly perhaps, a little air of mystery, which intrigued me extremely. I replied eagerly:

"Do you mean that Mademoiselle d'Oysanville loves me?"

"You have already put that question to me ten times, and I have answered twenty times—just double."

"Then she loves me, it's quite certain."

"But, my friend, that's ancient news you have been asking me about. There's something else—there's something new."

"Something new? I beg you, my good Monsieur de Magnancourt, to tell me what you know."

"Ah, faith! I should like to, but it's very serious."

"The more reason I should know it."

"Young people are—so—presumptuous."

"But my reputation for modesty is secured."

"They are so proud of their successes."

"That has nothing to do with me. Everybody

keeps saying I am ugly to such an extent, that I am beginning to believe that everybody is right."

"It would be a good thing if women were of that opinion. You would cause less unhappiness, my dear Roquelaure."

"Now you are beginning to make fun of me."

"I'm wrong; and let us speak seriously. And for that matter, the business which brings me to you is none too gay."

"You alarm me. Does it concern Mademoiselle d'Oysanville?"

"Yes."

"What has happened to her?"

"Nothing; but . . ."

"But what?"

"Something might happen to her before long, and a very sad something."

"Poor girl! What makes you fear?"

"Well, here's the business," said M. de Magnancourt, interrupting me, and pressing my hand with a show of emotion. "Yesterday Mademoiselle d'Oysanville expressed a wish to speak with me in private. So I took her alone into my cabinet, and there she gave a free reign to her thoughts, and revealed her inmost mind to me. 'You are an old man,' said she to me, 'and I feel that I can avow to you things that I should not dare to own even to my confessor. You know'—and as she entered upon this delicate subject she raised her eyes tenderly

to heaven—‘you know to what a degree I have given my affections to M. de Roquélaure. I have been unable to conceal my weakness from your practised eyes, and it would be an ill return for your fatherly kindness were I to think of concealing from you the whole or a part of the secret you have so adroitly guessed. So you know that this passion exists, but what you have perhaps not perceived is the depth to which its roots have penetrated in my heart, and the extremity to which I should be brought were I ever compelled to renounce the hopes I have cherished since the day when I first saw him. Well, imagine my grief, or rather, judge of my pain, for the other word is too weak. For nearly a week M. de Roquélaure, usually so gallant, so attentive, so loverlike, has scarcely looked at me; he seems to shun me and to avoid conversing with me. What have I done? How have I lost his regard? Has he anything with which to reproach me? I want to know the motive of this sudden change in him. Doubt tortures me; and, since I have learned to love, life seems so fair to me, that I cannot bear to let shadows fall on it, or even a suspicion of heaviness attach to it. I do not think I have shown coquetry, but if the kind of alienation I have mentioned is due to jealousy, I should be only too happy, and I should not complain. If not, and if distaste, satiety, indifference, in fact, is turning M. de Roquélaure from me, then I shall only take counsel of my despair, and—and . . .’

“ Well, go on.”

“ ‘ And I shall kill myself.’ ”

At bottom I was not displeased to have it said to my face that a woman, and a pretty woman, had determined to die for my sake ; but a prompting of my *amour propre*, which will be understood better than I can explain it, made me feign to take the thing as a trifle ; and I assumed a swaggering gait and exclaimed :

“ Kill herself ! The deuce ! Corneille could not make it more tragic than that.”

“ My friend,” resumed M. de Magnancourt, who had burst out in a sweat with making so long a speech, “ this is serious, more serious than you think. Now, I myself have been as given to gallantry and frolic as anybody in the world, but I have never been able to get clear of a certain fear, and some scruples, when it is a question of killing people. That a woman should sacrifice herself in our honour is certainly something to glory about. It is flattering ; but from the humane point of view the thing is serious enough to be looked at twice. And, in any case, it’s vile shadow to paint into the picture of one’s love-affairs . . . ”

“ But,” cried I, for my interest was genuinely caught, “ are you quite sure . . . ”

“ About what I am saying ? Look at me ! Do I look like a child ? Have I given you the impression that I am a liar ? ”

“You think that Mademoiselle d'Oysanville really might . . .”

“Hasten the end of a life that would be a burden to her? I think she is mad enough, or, speaking in the terms of philosophy, reasonable enough for that. To be unhappy and kill oneself—do you know any clearer consequence from an assured principle?”

The dialectics of M. de Magnancourt appealed to me much less than the fair damsel's simple and naïf resolve, if she had really formed it. From this moment my firmness was very seriously shaken, and my liberty was in undeniable peril. Besides, the worthy man's tone was so frank and natural, and he seemed to take so great an interest in me, that I abandoned myself to that swift course, upon the slope of which I was, without reminding myself that it was unsafe on either hand, and that at the bottom I should find one of those deep chasms into which a man may foolishly fall head foremost, where sometimes he escapes a broken back, but is certain to find abundance of brambles, flints and ruts; and, *horresco dicens*, from which he never returns.

So having forgotten these dangers, I declared to M. de Magnancourt, in whose eyes glittered a demoniacal glee, that I placed myself in his hands, and made him lord and master of my will and my amours. My hand passed into his gift by the same covenant, into the bargain as it were. So he had plenary

powers to act in my name, and arrange everything as he chose. When I recall that horrible compact I tremble as if the articles of it arose before me like spectres from the inferno. I tremble as if I were still condemned to execute them. Yet happily . . . but whither is my pen taking me? I will let my tale unfold itself in due order, and not mount some facts astride of others. In other words, I will relate things as they happened.

Delighted at having received from me a kind of mandate in blank, by means of which he could make me do according to his will, Monsieur de Magnancourt secured an interview with Mademoiselle d'Oysanville the same day, which interview lasted two hours and over.

I am entirely in the dark as to what passed at that memorable meeting, but I can certainly affirm that on the following days I thought I detected that Mademoiselle Thérèse d'Oysanville gazed upon me in the tenderest and most sympathetic fashion in the world, while on my side I regarded her with every appearance of the keenest and most sincere pity.

The next thing was to bring us upon the chosen ground together—I mean to a *tête-à-tête*. Now, that was the touchstone, the decisive proof, the culmination of the affair. The opportunity did not occur at once. In spite of the unsparing efforts of the old man and the good-will I myself brought to the matter, the lady and I could not manage to meet

alone. It is no slight task to set up all the conditions of a lovers' tryst of the sort. But our good star smoothed away these difficulties one evening, and a meeting previously arranged, but with a wonderful appearance of being fortuitous, brought us together at the bend of a charming avenue in M. de Lesdiguières garden. The place was one fit for sweet reveries, there was sheltering shadow, and there were marvellous scents that would have warmed the coldest fellow on earth, and given eloquence to a man born dumb. I did not need such strong incitement to stimulate me. I blocked Mademoiselle d'Oysanville's progress in cavalier fashion, and led her to a stone bench. Behind it was an admirable statue representing Psyche in the arms of Eros. It was impossible to imagine a more taking allegory, in view of the situation of things, or an example better adapted to the presumable trend of the scene to be enacted.

And yet, who would believe it? we both felt out of countenance on meeting. We mutually abashed one another, and it was easy to see that we did not see how to begin the matter. As for me, I own I did not know what to say, and I am damned if she had not the air of being in exactly the same situation as myself. Is there anything more grotesque in this world of ours than two people of different sex, left to their own devices in such wise that they are subject to no interference from anyone on earth, and not only

failing to use their liberty, but seeming to have no devices at all? And yet this was the absurd spectacle that Mademoiselle d'Oysanville and I offered for some minutes. Happily the only witness of the sad show we made was the clear sky of a fine summer night, and happily the sky, in spite of those thousands of stars that the poets would gladly represent to us as eyes, is absolutely discreet, considering that it sees nothing.

I must do Mademoiselle d'Oysanville justice; she had a better courage than I, and showed me an example. She came straight to the point.

"Monsieur de Roquelaure," she said to me, "I am still very young; but I am not such a child as not to understand what is passing around me. Besides, M. de Magnancourt has a way of sewing his dark little plans together with very white thread. I am perfectly well aware what he desires to lead up to. He wishes us to marry."

This beginning put me very much at ease. The first step had been taken, and I had but to follow my leader. My answer was certainly adroit, and sufficed to prove that I had preserved my self-possession.

"Mademoiselle, M. de Magnancourt's intervention was in no wise necessary on this occasion, and your charms would have enlisted me as your servant, though he had not been concerned."

That, I hope, may pass as superior gallantry. But far from producing on the young lady the effect

I expected, I saw that my answer vexed her to some extent, for she replied in a tone that verged upon annoyance:

"Monsieur de Roquelaure . . . I hardly know how to express myself without appearing ridiculous . . . but—well—in sober earnest, is it your purpose to marry me?"

"Is it my purpose? That now, really, is a question . . ."

"Which appears strange to you, I see it. But do not take it ill from me. So far I have only been assured of your sentiments through M. de Magnancourt, and he might—he might have—been mistaken."

I supposed that the excellent damsel, fearing to expose the secrets of her soul, was coming at the issue by a side wind, and trying to explore the course.

"Do you believe," said I, becoming interested in the play, "do you believe that M. de Magnancourt's intervention was necessary in what has passed? It matters nothing to us what he thought, provided we are sure what we feel. As for me, I know your excellences, your charms, your virtues . . ."

I could not but admit, even to myself, the detestable quality of my eloquence. I was lengthy, insipid and verbose. It did not seem to me as if *I* were speaking, and I did not really *think* a word I said. I stopped short, resolved to seek in some

corner of my sluggish imagination something less vulgar and of a better cut. I fancy Mademoiselle d'Oysanville took note of my embarrassment, and wished to relieve me of the annoyance of it, for she resumed almost immediately :

"You vaunt my excellences and my virtues, Monsieur de Roquelaure. Now, do you really know anything concerning them ?"

"Do I know them ? Should I be worthy to live if I had not been able to appreciate . . ."

"No compliments, please. I dislike them. Will you agree that we are to talk sober sense ?"

"What a depressing word !"

"Sometimes it saves a host of regrets."

"I fail to catch what you mean."

"Listen to me. Perhaps, after you have heard me, you will do me justice."

"I will begin by doing you homage. Is not that the first thing that is due to beauty ?"

"We are growing weak again."

"I will hold my peace."

Mademoiselle d'Oysanville reflected for a moment ; then she deliberately took my hand, and said :

"Do you know what is called a mirage at sea ? In a splendid twilight, in the dimness and distance, amidst a light curtain of mists, huge forests and vast mountains, palaces and churches and mosques arise. The sailors, when they see them, think they are dreaming. At first they behold the marvellous

picture in dumb admiration, scarcely daring to breathe or move, dreading lest they should scatter the illusion that is taking possession of them. Soon afterwards it makes their senses reel ; they forget that the objects they behold are but shadows, they spread every inch of canvas, they double the ship's speed, they handle her eagerly, and they sail to the happy spot. Then what happens? As the ship advances the picture recedes and grows smaller. It is like smoke that vanishes in the air. No doubt the goal was there, and the sailors took the right way to reach it ; and yet when they reach the place where that transparent city was hovering, where the unsubstantial gardens and crystal castles stood, everything has faded and disappeared. Love resembles this mirage, Monsieur le Marquis. There is a terrible difference between seeing things close and seeing them at a distance. Are you sure that your heart is not deceived when it seeks to judge me from afar? You think me pretty. Well ; and I please you perhaps ; but have I excellences and virtues, as you said just now? Has Heaven granted me enough of them to secure the happiness of a husband like you? I cannot tell, and yet I want to explain myself about it. If I have any excellences—and that is possible, of course—certainly they are not such as would be suited to you . . . and as for virtues, of whatever kind they were, I do not think I shall be very far from the truth if I say they would

have but little weight in the balance of such a love as yours . . .”

“Indeed, Mademoiselle . . .”

“Oh! indeed I am not covertly attacking you; I am making a comparison, and trying to draw the conclusions from it. You must show me I am wrong afterwards, if necessary. Now, this is the situation. We are both rich and noble, and nothing would prevent us from completing an affair where all the prejudices of the world would be perfectly respected; but should we find in ourselves the indispensable conditions of happiness and tranquillity . . . well, hear me out, I beg you.”

“I am all attention.”

“I was saying, do not you think, as I do, that the best-formed union would be one that would unite under the same rule two characters in perfect harmony, two hearts really made for one another?”

“No doubt; and I think that in this instance . . .”

“You think wrongly; nothing could be less in accord than our two natures, nothing would be more incompatible than our two wills . . .”

“Allow me to say . . .”

“Do not start aside from the subject, and let me question you. Are you not fond of luxury, of a gay life, of entertainments?”

“I cannot deny it.”

“Do you not sometimes take pleasure in extravagances and wild expenses?”

"What would be the good of disavowing what you seem to know so well?"

"Are you not a little unsafe on the point of constancy?"

"Mademoiselle, mademoiselle, there must be some sorcery in it! Who has told you all these fine things?"

"Nobody and everybody. Are you not known?"

"Too well, it seems."

"Why so? It is always better to be known as one is than to have a borrowed reputation exceeding one's real value; there are less chances of misreckoning and disappointment for you and for others. As for your own case, does it follow from what I have said that you may not be one of the most agreeable gentlemen of the time. Far from it; I believe, on the contrary, that you have many more successes before you. But even your excellencies would be faults in my eyes, for I am as homely in my tastes as you are modish in yours. I like solitude, quiet, tranquil pleasures . . ."

"Say the word and I will go to live with you in the depths of a forest . . ."

"That would not be precisely what I want . . . I am so happy by my own fireside."

"We would stay there as much as you wished."

"You are very extravagant, and I am very economical."

"We should balance each other."

"No! There would be continual strife, and that kind of bickering is always dangerous. Pray be reasonable, Monsieur de Roquelaure; you see that I am too quiet and simple a woman for you, and, especially, I am too cold . . . passion is not my bent . . . extreme sentiments are foreign to my character, and if it is true that you have resolved—as you told M. de Magnancourt—to carry matters, in the event of my refusing you, to a terrible extreme . . ."

"What extreme?" said I, very much surprised.

"Do not be annoyed with him; he revealed it all to me in your interests."

"But what did he reveal?"

"You seem not to remember. Well, you are right; forget that moment of fever and madness that you endured for the love of me. To kill yourself because I refused your addresses! In the first place, it would be folly to commit such an act; and then I should be rendered utterly miserable. I am your friend, Monsieur de Roquelaure—frankly and cordially, I am your friend."

No sooner had Mademoiselle d'Oysanville completed her remark than I understood what until that moment had appeared dark and occult to me. These endless precautions to telling me a fact to which I was almost indifferent, her oratorical preface that led to nothing, and the rest of it, had a hidden meaning that I disengaged from her last

words. An absent person, M. de Magnancourt, like an unseen divinity, had been directing this mysterious conversation. Beyond doubt, he had carefully sown the seed of our singular confusion ; and at that instant we were in the same false position as the workers on the tower of Babel, who spoke different tongues, and might have chattered, each one at his best, for a hundred years on end without getting forward by the process.

I, in turn, took up my parable, with a smile that was half merry and half serious.

"Mademoiselle, will you now allow me to put a few questions to you ?"

"Please speak on," she said.

"I will avail myself of your leave ; but do you promise beforehand to take what I am going to say as coming from—a friend ? Just now you gave me authority to use that title."

"I promise."

"That being so, Mademoiselle, I will wager that since we have stayed here, M. de Magnancourt has spoken a great deal to you about me."

"Oh, night and morning."

"He will have told you that the sight of you had reduced me to the most pitiable condition ?"

"It is true."

"That your name was eternally on my lips."

"Certainly."

"And that I had resolved—should you prove

unkind to my suit—to follow the promptings of my despair relentlessly, and kill myself—he said that, did he not ? ”

“ In so many words.”

“ Well, Mademoiselle, he told me the same about you.”

“ About me ? ”

“ Yes, about you.”

“ He wanted us to marry.”

“ It was a ruse to accomplish his purpose.”

“ And to think that I pitied you with all my heart.”

“ And I too—I would have married without more ado—to save your life.”

“ What a lie he told us.”

“ And what a foolish action we should have committed, if his words had been true.”

“ So,” resumed Mademoiselle d’Oysanville joyously, “ you do not love me ? ”

“ Certainly not.”

“ That’s thoroughly agreed.”

“ As if it had been attested by a notary.”

“ Oh, that’s a good thing.”

“ Ah, that’s a relief.”

A sigh of satisfaction escaped us both. It seemed as if we had been freed from a weight of a hundred quintals. And thus it was made perfectly plain that I had no more thought of dying for her, than she had of dying for me, and that on the contrary, we each

had a healthy appetite for life. This assurance put us both in a good humour again. Instead of the constrained air we had exhibited just before, instead of the awkwardness which, in spite of ourselves, appeared on our faces, we felt the most charming and benevolent expansion towards one another, and this formed the bond of a new and firmer liking. If we did not wish to be man and wife, nothing stood in the way of our being the best friends in the world, and in order that it might not be said our meeting had passed without results, we protested, banishing all carnal sentiments from our vow, that we would love and cherish one another all our lives.

It remained for us to make ourselves even with M. de Magnancourt, that he might not go unpunished for having worked upon us by his haphazard tales and too imaginative romances. Certainly his was a singular pastime for a man to choose. The inventing of jokes, the result of which may be to fill two whole lives with vexations of every description, oversteps every limit that the widest and most indulgent tolerance can concede to the jester. I, for my part, should never have allowed myself a joke of that description.

We had not much time for reflection. Scarcely had we been talking of him for five minutes when we heard the gravel crunched by a slow and measured tread. We lowered our heads and looked through the interstices of a clipped hedge that was thinner at

the bottom than at the top, and we saw our friend, at some little distance but undoubtedly engaged upon a search for his two victims.

"Let us go to meet him," I said to Mademoiselle d'Oysanville.

"But what are we going to say to him?"

"Never mind about that, I have my plan."

Mademoiselle d'Oysanville took my arm, and I commenced such a conversation with her in a low voice as must have seemed the most loving and impassioned that could be imagined. She was marvelously quick to support my play of features and gestures, the aim of which she did not as yet guess, but she clearly understood that I had calculated the effect it should produce. As soon as M. de Magnancourt had us in sight he joined his hands in glee, nodded his head as in pitying compassion and generously checked his advance, that he might not disturb us too soon. He was enjoying the fruits of his labour, and already saw us at the altar. At length I raised my eyes and feigned to feel surprise.

Mademoiselle d'Oysanville changed colour, not indeed with the tender feeling, but with the constraint she put on herself to avoid laughing, and this passed for an excellent augury in the old fellow's eyes. A girl who blushes is very near to yielding. And at this moment I saw his old cheeks suffused with a ruddy glow of satisfaction, which certainly meant,

"I have them."

We advanced silently towards him, and I recall that our gait was grave, solemn, and such as might be expected in a happy couple. In fact, we must have looked like a pair of engaged folk going to buy the wedding ring. I believe that at this point Mademoiselle d'Oysanville recognised and accepted my idea, for she seconded me with marvellous skill, and made her whole mien accord with mine. She inclined her head with a languor that was full of meaning, looked on the ground with a modest and abashed air, and seemed anxious to hide her blushes from the indiscreet gaze of an onlooker. Perceiving these telltale symptoms, M. de Magnancourt dismissed all doubts as to his triumph, and said to us in a fatherly tone:

"Well, my children, are you satisfied?"

"What a question!" I observed with emotion.

"You are agreed?"

"Oh, perfectly!" said Mademoiselle d'Oysanville.

"You have quite come to an understanding?"

"Better than you can imagine."

"And you will follow up my suggestions?"

"The result has shown that we could follow none better."

"Then listen to me. The most important part is done. Now you must show that you are worthy of your happiness, by completing it as soon as possible."

"That is our intention."

“ Will you entrust the preparations to me ? ”

“ You are too good.”

“ No ; it would afford me a distraction. I will go and tell the parson myself.”

“ Why tell the parson ? ”

“ That will not prevent your going through the ceremony again at Paris with a bishop if you like . . . but the parson of Grand-Mesnil is a worthy fellow, and with him you will lose no time.”

“ Pardon,” said I, taking him by the arm. “ What does all this mean ? A bishop, a parson—what are they to do ? ”

“ To give you the nuptial benediction, I suppose.”

“ And why ? ”

“ Eh ? ” said M. de Magnancourt, astounded.

“ Upon what account ? ”

“ Are you going mad ? Mademoiselle, is he going mad ? ”

“ Really,” she answered, “ I must own I cannot say—any more than he—what parsons have got to do with all this.”

“ Merciful Heaven ! ” cried the old man, utterly bewildered, “ have you resolved to do without the ceremony ? What, you, Mademoiselle, who have been entrusted to me by so honourable a family . . . ”

“ Well, Sir ? ”

“ What, Monsieur de Roquelaure ! You whom I thought to be an honest man ! ”

“ What is the matter ? ”

"The matter! The matter? If—an accident—happens, I shall be responsible."

"You are laughing at us."

"I am speaking in all seriousness."

"But what are you anxious about, when I reiterate that Mademoiselle d'Oysanville and I have a perfect understanding?"

"But it's not at all the sort of understanding I mean, if you don't mean to be married. Do I look like one who would promote a low intrigue? Whom do you take me for?"

"For a good fellow, whose heart I can read," I answered, "and one who will really be enchanted to see that his diligence and goodwill have borne such good fruit. What more can you want? Is not our happiness genuine?"

"No doubt . . . but . . ."

"*But?* We are happy."

"I have confessed my sentiments to Monsieur de Roquelaure," said Mademoiselle d'Oysanville, casting a glance at me.

"And I have returned the confidence," said I, reciprocating her glance.

"And," said M. de Magnancourt, anxiously, "the result is . . ."

"That neither of us is enamoured of the other."

To depict M. de Magnancourt's astonishment would be beyond me. I give up the attempt. He grew white and red, and sweated profusely. I be-

lieved for an instant that he was going to have a stroke of apoplexy, and I released Mademoiselle d'Oysanville's arm to give him aid. But he promptly recovered himself, and whispered :

"I don't quite understand—you say that—you do not love each other?"

"We never thought of doing so."

"And yet . . ."

"And yet you imagined we did, eh? And upon that you built the finest castles in the air and conceived the most romantic poetry. And with the result that when we set foot in the fine palace of your dreams it turns out to be made of dust and smoke, and we nearly fell into an abyss! Happily it occurred to us to reason coolly and enquire, before accepting the bonds of slavery, if we were really tired of being free. Thanks to the process of reasoning, we recognised at the right moment that we only had that unhappy inspiration *in your fancy*, and that this lofty love, resolved upon every sacrifice—including that of life itself—never existed anywhere, my dear Monsieur de Magnancourt, but in your fertile imagination."

"So," said the old man, thoroughly chagrined, "I was completely mistaken. And perhaps you can't even tolerate each other."

"Well, things, on my side at least, are not so bad as that . . . On the contrary, I am animated by the tenderest friendship . . ."

"And you may rely on mine," said Mademoiselle

d'Oysanville, interrupting me and offering me her hand. The bond between us though not so close will be none the less tender and sacred."

I thought it fitting to seal this pledge by a brotherly kiss, which I imprinted on her cheek. She accorded me this intimacy very graciously. M. de Magnoncourt did not know what to say.

A few days afterwards, Mademoiselle d'Oysanville's father came to fetch her, meaning to take her to an estate that he had in Berry, and it so happened that I had to leave on the same day to return to Paris, whither my regimental duty called me. Now, will anyone understand a sentiment which took possession of me at that very time—one which I tried in vain to shake off? So soon as my imaginary bonds no longer ceased to unite me against my will, as it were, to Mademoiselle d'Oysanville, I thought her more charming and attractive than ever. I found beauties in her which I had not suspected before, and thought of our separation with a kind of unwilling grief. What a dark and unfathomable abyss is the heart of man! He desires all that he has not, and on the very day when he obtains that which he coveted he ceases to see in it the value that he confidently attributed to it the day before. His will is one unbroken succession of affirmations and denials that swallow each other up and lead him towards divergent ends by conflicting courses. And I believe that even he who thinks he has

organised his life by the stern rules of reason and sound sense does, in the end, but follow the promptings of that wild, inexplicable whirlwind that directs the world. The wisest of us all is blown hither and thither by the gusts, and lives as chance decrees.

So let anyone who will explain this strange contradiction, but the fact is that the announcement of Mademoiselle d'Oysanville's departure wrought a great effect in me and grieved me deeply. She had become my friend, and I had accustomed myself to those sweet and smooth relations which are the ideal of rest upon earth. Affection without fear, mutual devotion without mutual servitude, is not that the very pith of friendship?

What am I to say? And then how shall I put it? I almost thought that the regrets which were arising in my mind were gaining entrance likewise to the heart of Thérèse d'Oysanville.

The appointed day arrived. We had to part. M. de Magnancourt, that perspicacious observer, neither perceived my grief, nor, a certain secret tear that I alone beheld.

Accompanied by her father, Mademoiselle d'Oysanville entered her carriage at the very moment when I mounted the horse that was to carry me in an opposite direction.

Our glances met and seemed to say, in the same language :

“To our next meeting.”

The wish was granted later. Where, when, and how? That will appear in due season. At the moment I have only to admit that while I rode towards Paris I began reflecting how M. de Magnancourt's idea was, after all, not a bad one, and concluded that Mademoiselle d'Oysanville was well worth the trouble involved in being married.

Unless some one else carries the place, now that I have raised the siege without striking a blow.

My peace of mind was scarcely assured by this conclusion to my meditation, and I set spurs sharply to my horse. Perhaps I hoped that I should thus escape the thought that was pursuing me. But I did not succeed, and my mind revolved the same fancies throughout my journey. I only awoke from the dream when I came to Paris.

Those dissensions, the germs of which were in the State, were rapidly maturing at the point selected, in their own interests, by the plotters and meddlers. All eyes were turned on Cardinal Mazarin, for the high favour conferred on him had made him the object alike of the most dangerous enmities and the most devoted adherence. This was the natural consequence of his rapid fortunes and of the daily growing influence he exerted in the procedure of the Government. Never, in fact, had man been so lucky as he, or raised himself by quicker or by nobler ways. By birth a mere gentleman of Rome, he had studied at the University of Salamanca, and

here he may have had his first foretaste of the glorious destiny which the future had in store for him. For upon having his horoscope cast one day he had been told that he would become Pope. Later he attached himself to the house of Colonna, and was afterwards employed in the service of Cardinal Sacchetti. Thence he passed to a more stirring life and was appointed a captain of horse. Perhaps he might have become a great warrior had not Heaven decided otherwise. Cardinal Barberini, becoming interested in him, urged him to take orders and don the cassock. Mazarin, followed the advice offered him, and it may well be said that he was no loser by doing so.

He gave fresh proof of his ability in his new condition. He several times found occasion to prove his competency in diplomatic negotiations and religious affairs, and was in consequence selected to be employed upon the peace of Casal, the results of which, as is well known, were all to the advantage of France. Richelieu appointed him his successor in state business, and he thus became in a fashion his heir presumptive.

The Regent Anne of Austria continued to accord him all the favour that Louis XIII had shown him, and his ascendancy in the difficult period of the King's minority amounted in reality to sovereign power. It is not my purpose in this place to justify my devotion to the person of this servant of the

State by more or less specious arguments. In my view, Mazarin was the Queen-Regent's right arm, and the young King's shield. The house of Roquelaure has ever shown its loyalty to the King, and no considerations in the world would have made me a renegade from this tradition. Setting aside that motive, which is at least as good as another, I own that I was personally inclined towards the cardinal, by reason of his keen, witty, kindly character, and his cool, immovable firmness. The device attaching to the arms he bore gave a perfect epitome of his whole life. They represented a rock lashed by the waves, with the legend: "*Quam frustra et murmure quanto!*" And in point of fact, neither all the clamour his enemies raised nor their reiterated attacks ever succeeded in shaking his courage. The allegory of the rock on which the waves of the sea were broken continued to be strictly fitting to the end.

As Mazarin rose, another man not far removed from him rose likewise; his eyes were fixed on the cardinal's power, and he stood ready to break it down, that he might reach an equal height, or even, in his turn, rule his rival, to whom he left no instant of truce or of repose. This man, Mazarin's keenest and most relentless foe, was the Abbé de Gondy, with whom we have had occasion to become acquainted in more frivolous guise and in less serious circumstances. He said that the cardinal-minister was of low, mean and obscure extraction, that he had be-

come a piper on leaving the Colyseum, and that on one occasion he had even been beaten by a goldsmith of Rome, named Moreto. "This worthy abbé," he wrote one day in his private correspondence, "this worthy abbé, after he had been for some time a captain at Valtellina, became known at the time of the war as a cheat. He is a libertine, a coward and a gamester . . . glory be to him!"

The libels, now beginning to be issued with an intolerable insolence, fastened upon these cruel allegations, and scattered the poison of them among the people. The blind credulity that is ever to be found among the multitude gave them effect. People persuaded themselves that Mazarin drew these violent attacks upon himself by mischievous government, and the flames, fanned by the suffragan, threatened to grow to a conflagration.

An incident that took place in 1645, in which the latter played a very important part, turned his head, by establishing him in an overweening opinion of his own influence and power. Marie de Gonzaga had been asked in marriage by Ladislas IV, King of Poland, and the marriage ceremony was to take place at the church of Notre Dame, and the Bishop of Warmie, nominated as one of the ambassadors who came to make the demand for her, had likewise been charged with the religious ceremony, which, in accordance with usage, was to be celebrated in Paris.

I was never troubled with too great a liking for the

suffragan, and shall not be suspected of too much indulgence in treating of him; but I am bound to observe that the proceedings showed a blameworthy levity in this connection and that the rules of clerical etiquette were not carefully enough observed. It was thought sufficient to send the Abbé de Gondy a *lettre de cachet* which enjoined that he should make the church ready for the Bishop of Warmie. No explanation was given; there was not a word more or less, and it cannot be denied that it was such an order as might have been given to a mere servant.

The suffragan was prompt to take offence, and he went, hot foot, to demand explanations of Mazarin. To authorise the Bishop of Warmie to marry the Queen of Poland at Notre Dame, was, in fact, an infringement of the suffragan's rights, and, in this matter, he spoke for the Archbishop and the entire Church of Paris. It was one of Mazarin's most admirable qualities that he knew how to observe self-restraint, but on this occasion he made the mistake of losing his temper and curtly referred the Abbé and his claims to the Queen. Anne of Austria, probably displeased at this, sent him back to Mazarin, who grew yet more angry and finally asserted that the suffragan had spoken to him—insolently!

Certainly the word was hard to digest, but Gondy contented himself with remarking, in the seemingly frivolous vein that was habitual with him:

“It's a good joke.”

However matters did not stop there, and the stir the affair made, grew ever the greater. Fortunately the Marshal d'Estrées intervened and thanks to his skilful good offices, a settlement was rendered possible. The Queen became gracious again, and the Cardinal naïvely asserted—for it was another of his good qualities that he would own when he was wrong—that he had not attached to the word “insolently” the meaning it would bear among us, but had employed it in the signification of the Latin adverb *insolito*. Whether the explanation was genuine, or invented to suit the case, it was worthy of an Italian and a man of wit.

Five days after the matter had been thus accommodated, a final attempt was made. The Archbishop himself sent a letter to the suffragan requesting him to allow the Bishop of Warmie to officiate. But upon this the suffragan turned stubborn, for he was a rare fiery devil in spite of his cassock, and affirmed that as the choir belonged to the Chapter he was unable to concede the point. The skirmish ended to his advantage, for, to put an end to it, it was determined that the marriage of Marie de Gonzaga, Queen of Poland should be celebrated at the Palais-Royal and to complete the drollery of the situation, the Bishop of Warmie was obliged to go in person to beg the necessary permission of the suffragan himself.

These successes carried the Abbé de Gondy off his balance. Some days later he had a dispute about precedence at church with the Duc d'Orleans, the

question arising about a carpet laid down to stand on.

The matter was adjusted through the intervention of Messieurs d'Estrées and de Senneterre ; but again the suffragan had the best of it, and the ill-will felt towards him was augmented accordingly.

Madame C . . . whose witty sayings and clever delineations were so much quoted at this time, said, speaking of Mazarin and the Abbé de Gondy :

“ Those two men seem to me like two dogs quarrelling over a bone. One is a big spaniel and the other a little cur, which is as much as to say that the one is generous and the other as spiteful as all the demons put together. The spaniel, Mazarin, is above these silly snarlings. After a smart blow or two with the paws he gives up the bone to the cur, the suffragan.”

This brief apologue, trivial as it is, conveys the truth excellently. Mazarin's gentleness was, in fact, equal to his strength, and his preoccupation about things of the first importance often made him regard certain minor intrigues as unworthy of him, and he regretted having imprudently concerned himself with them.

I shall be pardoned if I go back a few months, or even a year, to speak of myself again and prove beyond all contradiction that the frivolities, mirthful adventures and wild amours of life by no means prevented my thinking, upon due occasion, of serious

concerns and the more weighty interests of my future. The taste for the profession of arms, which was natural to me, could not but be stimulated by the account of the great events which were at that time proceeding in France, and forming a worthy preamble to the military glory which was destined to shine in its lustre during the reign of the great Louis. The Duc d'Enghien attacked General Merci with desperate valour under the walls of Fribourg, and with brotherly goodwill shared the honours of the battle with two Marshals of France, Grammont and Turenne, both of them worthy to march under the orders of so great a leader. The reduction of Philisbourg and Mayenne under the King's authority were the visible tokens of that memorable victory. Later, at Norlingue, the struggle was renewed between the same adversaries, and this time the result was still more decisive, for the enemy's general was killed during the fight. It is well known that Marshal de Grammont, by an unprecedented piece of ill fortune, was himself made prisoner on this day.

I should have bitterly regretted it had I been condemned to a disgraceful inactivity while these gallant heroes were thus exercising themselves in the noble sport of war. Happily there was no such matter. The Duc d'Orléans, brother of Louis XIII, had it at heart to uphold his renown as a Bourbon and son of Henri IV; he, too, wanted to be one of "the arms of France." He took command of the King's troops

and led them into Flanders. I was appointed Major-General on this occasion, and set forth with an aspiration to be more fortunate than I had been before. Heaven favoured me. The campaign was brilliant, and the capture of Gravelines is known as one of the brightest glories of Monsieur le Duc. We each had our share of that splendid success, and as far as I was concerned, I had the joy of taking my revenge upon the Spaniards.

Now, this attack on Gravelines was the first affair of importance in which I was able to give proof of capacity. I was placed in a more advantageous position than I had had in the contests at la Marfée and Honnecourt, and I proved worthy of my responsibilities. Thus the confidence shown in me by my promotion to the rank of Major-General was happily justified, and the *corps d'armée* which witnessed my behaviour esteemed me twice as much as formerly when a conversation I had with *Monsieur* after the affair became known in the camp. This worthy prince was informed of the manner in which I had carried a difficult position; he sent for me, and said with charming graciousness:

“We already knew, M. de Roquelaure, that all the wit of your father, the Marshal, lived again in you, but we did not know before that you possessed all his valour as well.”

My *amour propre* was abundantly gratified in this campaign, my good humour was sustained, and, on

my return, I felt more disposed than ever to enjoy life and maintain my reputation in every department. But before reverting to my exploits at Court and in the town I must impart to my readers a communication I received on my arrival in Paris. It was handed to me at the very moment when I was re-entering my house.

I received a rather ample letter, very carefully sealed, and in it M. de D——, of whom I have spoken previously, told me the following anecdote in full detail.

M. de D—— himself had had it from Bois-Robert, who, at one of his recent soirées, had recounted it to his guests.

One of Bois-Robert's talents was that he could relate things with such lively force that his stories were as vivid as an animated picture would be. His gestures, his voice, and his looks aided his easy, correct, and even elegant eloquence. These qualities reached such a point in Bois-Robert that Colletet said of him one day, "he should have been an actor." Here is the story.

Mademoiselle de Gournay was one of those women who are taken up with their knowledge and a belief in their superiority, who pique themselves on being profound and think themselves very advanced because they have poked their noses into the philosophy of Descartes or Gassendi without understanding any of it. Nothing could be more wearisome than her continual

repetitions, nothing more false than her judgment, nothing more ridiculous than her pretensions. In a word, she was an absurd creature of the kind that cannot even amuse. On the contrary, her monotonous folly was enough to kill the most patient and inured observer with *ennui*. One fine morning Mademoiselle de Gournay woke up and said to herself that to possess knowledge was not everything, and that she ought to be associated with the very best that the capital could offer in the way of poets and other men of genius. For some time past she had felt a disquieting passion for the exquisite Honorat de Bueil, better known as the Marquis de Racan, who excelled, as everyone knows, in turning little verses scented with the choice blossoms of gallantry. She was mad about him, though she had no acquaintance with him.

What was Mademoiselle de Gournay to do in this posture of affairs? What she did was very imprudent. She summoned the little Chevalier de Rosny, one of her most constant disciples, to her side, and told him that she counted upon his bringing the Marquis de Racan to her during the course of the day. Rosny, I know not on what ground, had had some recent cause of complaint against Mademoiselle de Gournay, and privily bore her a grudge. He supposed she was enamoured of Racan from his reputation, and he resolved to take this opportunity

of avenging himself upon her for her asperities, for at the bottom of the whole thing there certainly lay the recollection of a love affair that had failed. The Chevalier promised the lady that she should be satisfied, and that in a few hours she should receive the visit of her beloved poet. Thereupon Rosny went to one of his friends, by name Morvannes, who had been his boon companion, and had been concerned in certain facetious passages which would formerly have brought him within the cognizance of the officers of the criminal law. Morvannes was not troubled with scruples, and was not unwilling to do Mademoiselle de Gournay an ill turn. He did not know her personally, but he had more than once heard of her insufferable pretensions. So he made no difficulties.

Morvannes duly set out, and shortly Monsieur le Marquis de Racan was announced to Mademoiselle de Gournay. The enthusiastic damsel nearly fainted on hearing the name, and, what was no trifling matter, begged to be allowed to salute the Marquis. There are familiarities which genius has to endure. Morvannes submitted with a good grace, and as the young lady is still personable, he was not backward in returning her kiss with interest. Perhaps the kiss was not quite so chaste as the nine muses and the divine Apollo would have ordained. After this affectionate commencement, the lady reverted to thorough seriousness. She talked of everything on earth, and Mor-

vannes, well versed in expedients, answered with marvellous self-possession. She begged him to recite some verses, and Morvannes, who had never made a rhyme in his life, recited two or three passages from Montauban which she of course declared to be admirable, and vowed they could never have been written but by him, the Marquis de Racan. There was no end to the exclamations and eulogies; but the finest entertainment comes to an end, like everything else in this world. Besides, Racan as a poet who was sought after, courted, and celebrated, was wanted in twenty places at once, and could not resist people's teasing invitations without making bitter enemies. So he had to leave. Mademoiselle de Gournay resigned herself to the cruel separation; but before quitting her he promised her—he could not do otherwise—to return not later than the following day.

The enchanting Marquis had scarcely been gone an hour when a lackey came up, open mouthed and with an air of stupefaction, to announce that a gentleman was below who had asked for his mistress and given his name as Racan.

“He has returned! So soon!” cried Mademoiselle de Gournay, beside herself with joy.

“No, Mademoiselle, it is someone else.”

“Someone else! What are you talking of? What does it mean? Are you mad? Have you lost your head?”

The lackey preferred to establish his assertion by a fact rather than answer such a flood of questions.

He ushered in the new Racan.

Mademoiselle de Gournay, on beholding an unfamiliar face, felt inclined to resort to a fainting fit, but she reflected in time that this would not clear the matter up. She thought the surest way of discovering the truth was to control herself and await events, persuaded that if the present visitor was an impostor he would betray himself by his language or by some other lapse that she would detect more quickly than most people. So she concealed her emotion and begged the poet to be seated.

This Racan seated himself in a very ungainly fashion for a marquis. That was the lady's observation; but as a woman is never so ingenious as when she seeks to deceive herself, she assured herself that this very awkwardness was a proof of his identity. Truly great people are so clumsy in the simplest things of life.

Besides, no sooner was Racan seated than his tongue was loosened, his brilliancy sparkled, his genius awoke. A malevolent person might have said that he chattered, but Mademoiselle de Gournay thought he talked charmingly. Such conversation! Such a gift! Such grace—the kind of eloquence of which she had always dreamed. It must be owned that our poet lavished flattery of so gross a kind that Mademoiselle de Gournay was obliged to take it for

sterling currency. She was obliged to think him sincere for she could not suppose that he was laughing at her to her face, and that was the only alternative.

When she was quite sure of the position, and that Racan (Number 2) was certainly the genuine, the only veritable and authentic Racan, Mademoiselle de Gourney could no longer resist her longing to acquaint him with the deception to which she had just been subjected.

"Is it possible?" cried the poetical Marquis, trifling with his strawberry. "And you, adorable fair one, know no sign by which you could make me sure of recognising the scoundrel?"

"Indeed, I scarcely know how to describe him . . . you have made me forget him completely. I only recall that he had a very vulgar manner . . ."

"Some servants' hall rascal, I'll be bound."

"Very likely. Can you trust all your servants?"

"Can one ever trust the creatures? I should not be surprised, fair lady, if he were my groom."

"How horrible!"

"The fellow has his points, and has a great taste for stage plays, to such a tune that he often forgets to feed my horses, and hurries to the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where a kitchen wench is sometimes able to smuggle him in by stealth. He is quite equal, if he had learned that you fancy me, to pass himself off here, and no doubt he thought he was poking fun at me as well as you."

"What an outrage!" cried Mademoiselle de Gournay.

"It calls for vengeance, and you shall be satisfied, my admirable lady. The scoundrel shall have a thrashing that will kill him, I give you my word for it. . . ."

This assurance had a calming effect on the perturbed nerves of the learned damsel. She renewed her fire of questions, compliments and uninterrupted tokens of ecstasy and admiration. She knew his most familiar pastorals, and recited whole selections that he had never heard before. In spite of her enthusiasm, she observed that now and again he glanced at the clock.

"Are you pressed for time?" she asked.

"The Queen is expecting me," he replied at random.

Mademoiselle de Gournay withdrew her claim on his leisure at mention of this revered title. She dismissed him, requesting that he would not abandon her too long, but soon return to renew a visit which, she felt, had been too quickly terminated. I must not omit to add that before he quitted her she gave him a favour of ribbons, which he fastened to one of the button-holes of his breeches with great demonstrations of delight.

The conversation of men of parts is a celestial manna upon which certain zealous disciples nourish themselves, after the example of the Children of

Israel in the desert. Mademoiselle de Gournay was of such complexion. She gave herself up to recollection when the poet had gone, recalled his demeanour as instinct with nobility, his features as revealing genius, and after this rigorous criticism she became finally convinced that the first comer had been an impostor, who had sought to take advantage of her credulity. At this juncture it was announced to Mademoiselle de Gournay that a visitor who had not been seen before desired to see her.

"Show him in, and tell me who he may be," she replied loftily.

"Monsieur le Marquis de Racan!"

At the words, Mademoiselle de Gournay rose. She was no longer a woman, but a lioness, a dragon, a fury.

"How many Racans are there in the world?" cried she. "Are there Racans everywhere? Does it rain Racans? Very well; no matter which it is that has fooled me, this one shall pay for all. . . . Besides," she thought, as she watched the newcomer enter the room, "I am a judge of faces, and this is not M. de Recan."

She whipped off her slipper from her little foot, and threw it full in the Marquis' face. To a gentleman of rank, who was past fifty, the reception was scarcely gracious, and he was naturally astounded. He pulled himself together and looked around him. Another slipper shaved his nose. He thought he

must be dealing with a lunatic, and wished to speak . . . but she received his remark in such a manner that he avoided any further explanation, and made a prompt escape downstairs. Mademoiselle was not yet satisfied. In her rage she caught up a jug of water, and soused him pitilessly. The Marquis had never been entertained in that fashion. He took to his legs and fled down the street without so much as glancing behind him.

That evening the lady learned that she had fallen into a triple misfortune: firstly, she had kissed Morvannes, a rogue who was notorious in all the hells of Paris; secondly, she had bestowed her favour on Morvannes' lackey; thirdly, the genuine Marquis de Racan was indebted to her for a very severe cold, the natural consequence of the sousing he had been subjected to; and I do not think the Marquis will forget his rancour as long as he lives.

They say that Mademoiselle de Gournay was very vindictive—she was dead before I took up my pen to write of her—and that she never forgave the little Chevalier de Rosny the trick he played upon her. He had a reputation as a relentless satirist and a malicious wit, and it will be owned that he earned it.

Some time after the affair at Gravelines I was in Paris, and it will have been noticed that I only absented myself from the capital when I was obliged to. I now became concerned, almost against my will, in an adventure which might have had the

most disastrous consequences to my welfare, and I escaped unharmed by sheer luck. I will take advantage of this occasion to render Fate her due, and avow that she has always treated me like a spoilt child; I have escaped with a scratch where another man would have met death in a hundred forms. I will not involve Providence in so petty a question as that of my personal interests, but I must believe and confess that my bones had been placed under the active and watchful protection of a god recognised by the ancients: Chance.

My favourite walk was the Tuileries. It was my custom almost every day, after I had paid my respects to Her Majesty or to His Eminence the Cardinal, to take a turn in the Feuillants. One evening, it was in the summer, I went there as usual—and I may mention, by the way, that I found it a poor diversion to count the trees, watch the sun setting below the horizon, and remark upon the appearance of the passers-by—when I noticed an old woman at some few paces distance from me. She was dressed in black serge, was at least fifty years of age, as thin as Tysiphine in a picture, as yellow as a lemon, and with all the air of a landlady from one of the most modish quarters of Paris. Her manner showed great assurance, her demeanour was bold, and modesty was not the most striking quality of her eyes. She scrutinized me several times in succession, and that with incredible impudence, subjecting my

face, my carriage and my clothes to a careful inspection one after the other. This procedure excited my curiosity, and I was already disposed to question the crone, for her behaviour was enough to cause talk, when I saw her approaching me, and at the same time she made mysterious signs to me and favoured me with a smile of intelligence which, as will be understood, increased her ugliness infinitely. I said no word, but no doubt my face expressed my surprise, and looked the question which I did not ask; for she said, answering the thought she evidently attributed to me:

“Have no concern, good sir. I have no ill purpose towards you, and my respect for you equals my devotion.”

“You are mistaken, my worthy woman,” I said to her, scanning her disdainfully, “if you think you are to be feared by anyone. But I would have you note that a man, though he be in a public place, may be little inclined to tolerate the impudent stare of any old witch or idle fellow he may meet . . . so go your way, my good woman, and be less impertinent in future.”

This very plain reproof in no wise disturbed the old woman's composure, and she replied, joining her hands as in supplication:

“My lord! Monsieur le Marquis, should I be so unfortunate as to make a mistake about so noble and generous a gentleman as you? Ah! if I were

ungrateful . . . but luckily I am not, and the twenty pistoles you gave me yesterday make up for a great many things . . .”

“Twenty pistoles! What does that mean? What do you mean by your twenty pistoles?”

“Did not you mean to give me so much?” said the old woman in a pitiful tone. “In that case I am truly grieved, for I made use of the whole sum this morning for some very pressing needs.”

“My worthy woman,” I replied shortly, “will you be kind enough to explain yourself more clearly?”

“Ah! you are right. You did not meet my mistress before dark yesterday, and at the ball where you did meet her, you were masked as well as she, and you left her house before day dawned this morning. You do not recognise me, and that’s easily explained, for you did not see me, and I hardly spoke to you.”

I was evidently in a way to get something for my trouble, and I at once resolved to take advantage of the opportunity. I drew the old woman under the chestnut trees, and said:

“Now I see. There’s nothing like arriving at an understanding. Come a little further away from the throng, my worthy friend, and if you continue to serve me loyally it will be in your discretion to increase the sum of twenty pistoles that I gave you by half.”

"I was sure I was right," said the crone proudly. "I'm not the one to make mistakes in such important matters. Before I addressed you I had found out all I needed; and though I never saw your face last night, I was sure of finding you, for you told my mistress your name, and whispered me just where your house is."

"Ah! I told my name to your mistress?"

"Of course."

"And I told you where I live?"

"Oh! if you hadn't, I should have found you easily enough."

"So I am well known in Paris?"

"You can tell that better than anyone else, Monsieur le Marquis. Is there one single woman who does not know—at least, by hearsay—where the Hotel de Roquelaure is?"

I was astounded. Until that instant I had been convinced that the old woman took me for someone else, and that I should soon learn in whose place I stood, and whom I should represent *ad interim*. Not a bit of it. I was the person sought, I was the hero of the story, and I had made the present of the twenty pistoles. The affair had begun too well for me to drop it at this point. I drew myself up, put a good face on it, and replied like a man who is sure of his facts:

"Very good, very good; we shall get on without compliments of that sort. Roquelaure knows

what he wants, and equally dislikes to be decried and to be praised beyond discretion. Let us get back to the interesting part of our talk. But first let us perfect our acquaintance, and tell me your name and who you are."

"You weren't so inquisitive last night, my worthy gentleman, and you were quite content to know that I should not put a spoke in our dear Madame Corbin's wheel when she consented, just because she had told you her name, to take you home with her to spend the night . . . But never mind . . . if you wish to know more, Monsieur le Marquis, I am the widow of Jean Poulard, formerly a warden of the Bastille, and I now follow the calling of a dealer in second-hand dresses, fairly, honestly, and as a means of gaining my living. Madame Corbin's room is just above my back shop, so I heard the noise you made when you were leaving her at daybreak. And then I came out to meet you, for I recollected the noble way you had dealt with me when you came in, and I let you out by the door of my little shop, so that you avoided coming to close quarters with Corbin, who is the most hideous husband that was ever decorated with a pair of devil's horns, and was snoring, as his habit is, loud enough to bring down the walls of Jericho . . . But why are you so deep in thought, and why have you that doubtful, troubled look—have you forgotten it all?"

"Oh, yes, parbleu!" I replied, summoning all my

self-assurance ; "I recollect every one of the circumstances perfectly . . . But, about the ball—do you know, Madame Boulard, that it was a very brilliant affair !"

"Poulard, Monsieur le Marquis . . . Brilliant is hardly the word; but what can you expect? There is a great difference between a gathering of humble folk in the Faubourg St. Antoine and a soirée at Court. Old Vaumorin paid the expenses of the evening to celebrate the anniversary of his daughter's marriage with a master hatmaker in the neighbourhood, and he is neither a count, a baron, nor a duke. The guests, under their disguises, all had a common air and were ill at ease, men and women alike, as you must have seen, And that partly explains, my fine gentleman, the huge impression you made."

"Really now, I made an impression ?"

"A marvellous one. In spite of the simple doublet of an archer of King Charles IX that you wore, everyone guessed that you were a great man at the Court. And I may tell you, between ourselves, poor Madame Corbin, when she found that she had danced a saraband with M. de Roquelaure, very nearly fainted and fell into my arms."

"Compliments apart, they thought I looked well?"

"All the women were crazy about you, and all the men were burning with jealousy."

"And in your opinion, my good Madame Foulard, did I dance passably ?"

"Poulard, if you please . . . you danced like an angel."

"Were my attentions to Madame Forbin noticed?"

"You mean Corbin. Certainly they were noticed, but there was nothing beyond a little scandalmongering about it."

"Ah, yes . . . but her husband?"

"You know he was not there."

"Quite so—quite so. I had forgotten."

"Poor little Madame Corbin! What an adventure for her. But I keep talking and talking. It is time you should know, Monsieur le Marquis, why I have jogged your memory about all this. I have something very important to say to you from her. In spite of her promise she cannot receive you to-night."

"Oh, what a wretched misfortune," said I, with the most natural air of disappointment, "when she had pledged herself in so many words . . ."

"I know, and she will be more grieved than you. But she cannot help it. Her husband is suspicious."

"Oh!"

"He says he had a dream last night, which told him that his wife was not as faithful to him as she ought to be."

"Only to think—even dreams interfering in these matters, as if they were concerned with them!"

"So my mistress wants you to put off your visit for a day, and she will await you to-morrow."

"To-morrow, very good. At what time?"

“Midnight.”

“At the first stroke of the hour, I shall be with her. And which way shall I enter?”

“Shan’t I be there?” said the old woman, with an evil smile.

“Ah, true—I was forgetting.”

“Good-bye, Monsieur le Marquis—the hours will seem long until to-morrow.”

“Here is something, my worthy Madame Poulard, to make them run more easily with you. You can reckon this up while you are waiting for me.”

As I said this, I slipped a purse into her hand.

“More! Oh, my lord, you are too kind,” cried the hag, eagerly stuffing her booty into the large pocket of her apron, a hungry abyss that must have swallowed many another treasure, won in the same honorable fashion.

She was making off; I caught her by the arm and stopped her, for I still lacked a piece of valuable information for getting to this rendezvous.

“I have only once seen,” said I, with some hesitation, “Madame Sorbin’s house and then it was very dark.”

“Corbin,” murmured the second-hand dress seller.

“And I am afraid I do not recollect clearly enough . . .”

“Oh! that does not matter . . . Just give me your attention, Monsieur le Marquis. You go up the Faubourg St. Antoine.”

“Yes.”

"You get as far as the hay and corn shop."

"Exactly."

"Opposite, on the left, you see a little street without a name."

"Of course."

"You turn into it."

"I turn into it."

"And at the very end you see a green door, above which you see the words, 'Veuve Poulard, Second-Hand Dresses.' But I told you all that this morning when you were going away."

"Quite true, quite true. The devil take my memory! I keep forgetting about this morning."

"Ah! well, it was so very dark. You knock."

"I knock."

"Yes, but quite softly."

"With the tips of my nails."

"I open for you."

"My excellent Mother Toulard."

"Poulard, if you please. I lead you, as I did this morning, to the staircase."

"I go up the stairs at a bound."

"You get into the room."

"And the rest is my business."

"Good luck, Monsieur le Marquis!"

"Good night, Madame . . ."

"Poulard," said the crone, completing my sentence for me. Then she made me a deep courtesy, and went off by the way she had come.

When I was alone, I thought I had been dreaming. But I soon collected my wits, and felt convinced that my good fortune was a solid and fine reality. So I had made a conquest without knowing it, and without attempting it. I had won a lady who had never seen me, and had plunged into a sea of amorous joys without recollection, weariness or pleasure. However the adventure should turn out, I could not deny that it had begun to perfection; and I think I have displayed my character sufficiently by now to make it plain that I was not likely to leave it uncompleted. I made up my mind to go to the Faubourg St. Antoine and have an ardent scene of explanation with Madame Corbin, if I could. While I was digesting this plan, and considering it and drawing out of it its various developments, I walked five or six times across the Tuileries from one end to the other. The impatience that the untoward delay aroused in my heart increased the activity that was natural to me. I hastened my pace, as if I had been marching to capture a redoubt. At last I stopped short, struck my forehead with an air of resolution, and exclaimed:

“No; I will not wait till to-morrow to solve the riddle . . . It matters not to me whether Goodman Corbin has suspicions or not; let him sleep or stay awake, it is his concern. I have no time to wait, and as it is clear that the lady began by promising me a meeting to-night, I shall prove myself worthy

of the favour by keeping the appointment punctually, with my hat cocked, my moustaches brushed up, and, if necessary, my rapier in my hand. A lover never makes a mistake by being eager. Besides, in case I should be watched, and to keep clear of complications, I shall put the moment of my triumph forward a little, and I shall go at eleven instead of midnight."

I was finishing the details of this plan in my mind when I was addressed by Ménage, who had just left the suffragan, and who wearied my ears with the schemes of this intriguing person and his quarrels with Cardinal Mazarin. These were subjects of conversation to which I was very little inclined to give attention, for I was taken up with interests of quite another kind. Ménage always had the reputation of a great talker. In the literary assemblies he frequented he rarely left it to others to speak, and used to relate, by way of excuse, that when he was in Anjou he was considered taciturn, for all the other people talked more than he did. That day I was the victim of one of his interminable fits of wordiness. He passed lengthy reflections on the hostile attitude which the suffragan of Notre Dame and his following affected, and gave me his personal opinion about the probable consequences of this untoward state of affairs. I daresay he drew no conclusions but such as were full of sagacity and worthy of his insight. I have no doubt he uttered the finest truths about the matter, but in all humility

I own that the little which filtered in at my left ear passed out immediately at the right, and no sign or trace of it remained. I contented myself with answering "yes" to all his questions, and sometimes limited myself to a harmless movement of the head, which he had every right to interpret as a token of mute approval. Gondy, Mazarin, the Queen-Regent, the Princes. The pratings of one and the grumblings of another. Well, I had plenty of other matter in my head, and I am damned if I could think of anything at the moment but the strange directions of the second-hand dress-seller and the unknown charms of the worthy Madame Corbin.

But *Ménage* would not come to an end, and seemed to take pleasure in playing with me as a hungry cat might with a mouse. At the risk of ruffling his sense of politeness, I got away from his clutches, making some improbable business my excuse, and literally ran off. I left him with his mouth open, and, for aught I know, he continued speaking to himself.

When I came by the side of the Seine, I breathed more freely, cursing the busybody who had broken in upon the midst of my scheming, and inwardly praying heaven to preserve me from any other tiresome and awkward meeting. Then I hurried to my house, gave orders that I was not within for anybody, and shut myself in my room.

Half an hour after I had given the order I was told that a very spruce and sprightly little lady, dressed in brown and wearing a heavy veil, had called and asked to see me. My Cerberus had been relentless, and the afflicted fair one had gone away without further words. I ran up to an attic, which commanded a considerable view of the divers approaches to my house, and thence saw a retreating figure in the twilight. I recognised her easily by her gait. It was Madame d'Alibon.

I was genuinely sorry for the accident which forced me to close my door to her, for I had preserved the tenderest and most pleasant relations with that charming woman. But the die was cast, and it was no doubt written in the changeless book of Destiny that this day was to be devoted to a fresh caprice and a new divinity.

So when night set in I supped alone and hurriedly ; then I rang for Bruscambille, my valet, who, I may remark by the way, was a cunning fellow, and I began to make a serenader's toilet with every characteristic of the Spanish lover. I omitted nothing—neither the broad brimmed hat, nor the light sword, nor the short tunic to match the colour of a wall. Bruscambille, whose only fault was that he was a little too much of a busybody, ventured on two or three questions in the following vein :

“ Is Monsieur le Marquis waiting on the Queen this evening ? ”

"What business is that of yours?"

"Monsieur le Marquis knows the interest I venture to take in all his successes of every description, and if my little services could be of any use to him . . ."

"Not this time, Bruscamille, not this time."

"Monsieur le Marquis knows that I am always ready."

"Speak a little less, and look sharp with my pocket-handkerchief."

"Here it is."

"What! Unscented? Have you none of the Queen of Spain's scent there?"

"Yes, here is the bottle. Now I am quite sure how Monsieur le Marquis is going to spend his evening. He is going to see Madame de Guéménée or some other lady who has been happy enough to win his attention for the present."

"You have guessed that, Bruscamille?"

"Who would not guess it in my place," said the impudent rogue. "Is not it known that that is the favourite pastime of Monsieur le Marquis? Is there anyone in France who does not know it? I wish Monsieur le Marquis could have heard what all the gentlemen's servants were saying of him when they were under the vestibule of the Palais-Royal, waiting for their masters to come out after the Queen's reception."

"Oh! so the servants were busy with my doings?"

"Yes, and the servants say some smart things sometimes. Will Monsieur le Marquis judge for himself if they do not?"

"Very well, let us see."

"We were talking," resumed Bruscombille with assurance, "of all the young gentlemen of equal rank with you, and it was a brisk conversation, and when it ended, one of us who is no fool . . ."

"You, I wager."

"It might be so, Monsieur le Marquis . . . one of us summed up the discussion in this way—it had specially concerned M. d'Enghien, M. de Beaufort, M. d'Epernon and you. The first, said he, goes to war, the second to prison, the third to the gaming-table. As for M. de Roquelaure, he lets all these things look after themselves, and he goes to the ladies."

Bruscombille swallowed the sweet savour of this witticism with such gusto as left me no doubt who was the author of it; it was not badly put, and I complimented him on it. He would have gone on to outdo this sally, but it was growing late, and I cut short his ingenious inventions by throwing him a pistole, which he caught in the air. He accompanied me into the street, and I soon disappeared in the winding ways of the city. When I reached the Bastille, I slackened my pace to collect my ideas and avoid presenting myself when hot and out of breath. A quarter of an hour later I was wandering mysteriously round the house that the worthy

Madame Poulard had indicated; it was not difficult to recognise places, for the night was not dark, and in the vague light that prevailed I could discern the sign I sought easily enough. I took four or five turns about the spot more or less slowly, up the street, across the street, and then zigzag, then I gave a rapid finishing touch to my toilet, and then I made my final plunge into the street without a name, which also seemed to be without an outlet, and therefore had much the appearance of a blind alley. The planks that composed the wall of the shop were badly joined, and through the chinks I saw a feeble light glimmering, which no doubt came from an old greasy lamp or a nightlight. I scratched on the boards, but no one stirred. Then I tapped with my hand, but there was no response. Then I knocked with my knee: a voice which I easily recognised called from the far end of the back room:

“Who is it?”

“It is I,” I answered, taking my chance.

“You worthless rascal!” said the same voice, with an accent of malevolence. “Must we set the dogs at your legs to cure you of your vile jokes? Go your way, gallows-bird, and look for amusement elsewhere.”

I understood that nobody was expected, and that the action which was taken so ill was put down to some mischievous clerk of the neighbourhood. Small tradesmen are usually subjected to their nightly

pranks, and each one serves as victim once or twice, but each takes a pride in not falling into a trap. I could only conquer Madame Poulard's mistrust by perseverance, so I began to scratch and tap and knock afresh.

END OF VOL. I.

